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THE **NEW**

T P P I N G

Dossie Easton & Janet W. Hardy

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the new
**Topping
Book**

by Dossie Easton
and Janet W. Hardy



greenery press

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Readers should be aware that BDSM, like all sexual activities, carries an inherent risk of physical and/or emotional injury. While we believe that following the guidelines set forth in this book will minimize that potential, the writers and publisher encourage you to be aware that you are taking some risk when you decide to engage in these activities, and to accept personal responsibility for that risk. In acting on the information in this book, you agree to accept that information as is and with all faults. Neither the authors, the publisher, nor anyone else associated with the creation or sale of this book is responsible for any damage sustained.

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foreword

RE-VISIONING

Welcome to *The New Topping Book*. About ten years ago, we published a small volume called *The Bottoming Book*, which took the revolutionary stance that bottoming was as high an art as topping and that skilled and ethical bottoms were integral to hot play. No sooner had it come out than we started hearing from tops who wanted to know when we were going to do the same thing for topping. Hence *The Topping Book*, originally published in 1994.

But in the last eight years we've seen huge and important changes in BDSM culture (including the popularization of the very word BDSM!). Our communities have grown tremendously – largely due to the Internet, which was in its toddlerhood at our last writing – and become much more visible. And we, your authors, are proud to have been part of this evolution. So: *The New Topping Book*.

As we wrote in *The New Bottoming Book*:

S/M culture has massively emerged from the closet. There are dozens of books, endless information on the Internet, national and international conferences publicly held in major hotels, support groups everywhere – we are no longer the ghettoized subculture that we used to be. More people are connecting to S/M, finding others like themselves, and realizing that they are very much not alone with their kinky fantasies.

THE INTERNET. The 'Net has become a major player in the BDSM scene. Along with providing lots of information about kink and connection to like-minded people, the Internet is also exerting a major influence on the content of BDSM. Many things can be done in virtual play that would be difficult to manifest in reality: for instance, we know individuals who are engaged in ownership relationships with people they have never met in person. And so new ways of playing are being devised, and participants are engaging in ever deeper explorations of the psychological aspects of S/M, including extensive dialogue about how our fantasies can inform us about ourselves. The challenge of interacting with people all over the world, people that you've never seen face to face, has created a whole universe of possibilities for relationships, interactions and new knowledge. We'll discuss the 'Net and its ramifications at much greater length later in this book

D&S. Over the last ten years, we have also seen rapid growth and evolution of the dominance and submission aspect of BDSM, with extensive discussion of how the relationship dynamic between two or more persons can be expanded,

intensified and eroticized by a conscious and consensual shift in the workings of power and control. We've included a lot more information about D&S in its various forms in this book.

MORE OF US. Meanwhile, as the scene has become more accessible, more and more new people are joining. This growth in population has made its own changes to the scene, and there is increased market for products and services, which offers much more support for the teachers, artists and craftspeople of our community.

For us this growth has offered an expanded opportunity in the form of a much wider audience for our writing. When we wrote the initial *Bottoming Book*, publishing in this area was so economically constrained that we had to keep the book under 120 pages because if it got bigger than that we couldn't afford to print it. How's that for basic? We are proud to announce that our books are now widely distributed, our publisher well established, and we can afford to speak our minds at whatever length we choose.

LANGUAGE. One thing we learned in writing and selling *The Bottoming Book* and *The Topping Book* was that many potential readers were overlooking the books, feeling that the terms "dominant" and "submissive" were a closer fit for their experience of BDSM. We certainly never intended that, nor do we think it appropriate. Semantics vary widely throughout the kinky world, from one region to the next, one sexual orientation to the next, one playstyle to the next. The way we learned the terms when we first came out into this wonderful and varied world, "top" is an umbrella term that includes people who like to play on the giving end of sensation and pain, bondage, control and discipline and all the other activities that make up the universe of BDSM. And "bottom," of course, is the umbrella term for all those who like to be the lucky recipients of such attention. Whether you consider

yourself a master or mistress, an owner or trainer, a dominant, a sadist, a daddy or mommy, or any other terminology that fits your community and your life, you'll find something for you in this book.

Indeed, as more and more people want to talk about kink both in the cyber- and real worlds, we are constantly evolving new language and terminology to describe our experiences. And do we all agree on what these new terms mean? Of course not! A definition can be visualized as a way to make a fence around a word so that we can clearly distinguish what is inside and what is outside the meaning of the word. This works great for science and mathematics, but can be a problem when we are describing our physical, sexual and emotional experience – especially the experience between two or more of us. (See? We can't even assume that a relationship means only two people.)

So our approach to language in this book is to assume inclusive rather than exclusive meanings for all the words we use. Furthermore, we acknowledge more than two genders, and also that many of us explore more than one sense of gender. Common language usage has very few ways to denote the full range of gender expression. In the first edition of *Topping Book* we wrote "s/he" in an attempt to include everybody. In our later books, we alternated using he or she, mostly by paragraphs, which seemed to read more smoothly and provide interesting opportunities to challenge gender stereotyping, so we have rearranged this edition accordingly.

On another linguistic front, here is much public discussion and dissent about what to call what we do. Various our activities have been described as: BDSM, perversion, sadomasochism, S/M, dominance and submission, D/S, altsex, bondage and discipline, B/D, leathersex, kink, erotic power exchange, fetishism, wiitwd (what it is that we do), powerplay, shadowplay, topping and bottoming, sex magic and radical perversion. Similarly, the people

who do these things are known as: perverts, tops, bottoms, masters, mistresses, slaves, dominants, submissives, daddies, mommies, pitchers, catchers, boys, bois, girls, babies, pets, ponies, puppies, sissies, leatherpeople, players and more.

All these words have slightly different meanings, and you will definitely meet people who choose one of these terms and not the others because that is what best describes their desire. We, however, enjoy all of these aspects of our play, and would be very distressed to have to choose only one category. Thus, as we see it, pigeonholing limits our experience, and we are explorative girls who always want more. So in this edition, we will use all of these terms to describe the whole world of S/M play, except when we are focusing on one particular aspect of play, and we will use these terms, as we do the gender pronouns, interchangeably throughout the text.

THE INTERLUDES. Since no amount of abstract instruction carries the same weight as the stuff that happens in the real world, throughout this book we've included a few stories of wonderful scenes we've done, watched or heard about, just to give you an idea of the wide range of activities that can be included under the umbrella term "topping."

Please don't take these scenes as blueprints, or even as ideals of "perfect" scenes. They're just representative of a few different playstyles, ways of building energy and connecting and having hot sexy fun together.

WE'VE CHANGED TOO. The two of us have matured, which we hope would happen for any of you in ten years. Our children are no longer children, our careers have ripened, our bodies have aged.

In fact, one of us has changed so much that even her name has changed. The one of us who wrote the first *Topping Book* as "Catherine A. Liszt" did so under a pseudonym, because at the

time she had minor children whose boundaries she wanted to protect. Now that her children have grown to adulthood, “Catherine” is now writing and publishing under her real name, Janet W. Hardy.

And we know more than we used to. So the final reason to make a new edition of *The Topping Book* is to share with you everything new that we have learned in the last nine years about our beloved world of BDSM.

HELLO AGAIN!

We love tops. We love tops who are vicious and nasty and turn their bottoms into cringing mounds of adoring submission. We love tops who are nurturing and sweet while they inflict the most amazing agonies. We love tops whose aura of command is so straightforward and matter-of-fact that their bottoms can completely forget, for a little while, that the world is a complicated place.

We love top daddies and top mommies, top nurses and top interrogators, sweetheart sadists and control queens, nurturing dominants and mean mistresses, nasty kids and mad scientists.

We love tops so much that we're writing a book to help make sure there are more good ones: tops who glow with the pure white light of control, power, intimacy and love; tops who are skilled at their craft and passionate about their art; tops who pour themselves into their bottoms, beat well, and create a dish as fiery as curry or as sweet as pie.

YES, IT'S US AGAIN. Hello. We're Dossie Easton and Janet Hardy. Some of you met us in our earlier books, *The New Bottoming Book*, *The Ethical Slut* and *When Someone You Love Is Kinky*.

Dossie is a three-decade veteran of S/M play who identifies as a dyke queer bottom, but who tops beautifully: as of this writing, Janet has the cane marks to prove it. She works as a therapist in San Francisco. A poet, teacher and performer, Dossie was one of the first members of the Society of Janus in San Francisco, and has been a leader in the S/M spirituality community.

Janet started doing S/M about 15 years ago, exclusively as a heterosexual top. Today, she identifies as a bisexual switch, playing both as a top and as a bottom, and with both men and women. Under her pen name "Lady Green," she wrote several how-to manuals for beginning players and has published many articles on S/M practice and philosophy.

Both of us have spoken and taught, individually and together, at dozens if not hundreds of conferences, gatherings and workshops.

WHY WE'RE WRITING THIS. In *The New Bottoming Book*, we did our best to explain what makes people decide to try bottoming in a BDSM interaction, and the attitudes and techniques that make up a brilliant bottom. We looked at matters of the body, the emotions, the intuition and the spirit.

In this book we will do the same for tops. In some ways, we expect this to be a trickier task. While outsiders often assume that any player in his right mind would be a top – "Wow, you mean people will do anything you want them to? Cool!" – the reality is that the joys of topping are often more abstract than those of bottoming, and that its responsibilities and burdens are great. *The New Bottoming Book* was, as we wrote in the introduction,

“an unabashedly bottom-centrist book.” We expected howls of protest from tops over our insistence that bottoms are powerful, beautiful and irreplaceable... and we heard back from a whole bunch of tops saying “Well, it’s about *time*.”

So *The New Topping Book* will be a *top*-centrist book. While we will, of course, expect responsible behavior from all you tops and wannabe-tops who are reading this, we honor and applaud your willingness to venture out on the thin, scary ice of taking control of another’s sensations, emotions and spirit. In this book, we’ll encourage you to insist on being recognized for your humanness as well as for your toppiness, to demand the nurturance and support you deserve, and to find ways to get your sexual needs met. We’ll do our best to hold your hand during the scary parts of your top journey, and to wave an encouraging bye-bye as you venture out into that wide, welcoming world of eager bottoms.

THIS IS NOT A TECHNICAL MANUAL. We’re not going to spend a lot of time in this book teaching you bondage knots or clamp placement or the technical nuts and bolts of topping. We think there are several other good books out there that teach such things, and we’ve listed them in our Resource Guide. Please read at least one of them before you play.

HOW WE VIEW BDSM

If you turned to this section hoping to find the ultimate incontestable answer to the question “What is BDSM?” we’re afraid we’re going to disappoint you. We don’t know, either.

We do believe that consensual, ethical kink has a valid place on the continuum of human sexual behavior – that it’s not an expression of pathology. We also do not see S/M players as a distinct sexual minority, somehow different from

other folk; we think S/M may be further along one road of sexual exploration, but that many if not most people play with some forms of S/M energy.

S/M is sex that involves all of our faculties: minds and bodies, imagination and intellect, hearts and souls. To those who call what we do “unnatural,” we like to point out that we do what comes naturally: nature gave us opposable thumbs, so we use tools.

As we said in *The New Bottoming Book*: “S/M is play, theater, communication, intimacy, sexuality. It combines the child’s urge for make-believe with the adult’s ability to take responsibility and the adult’s privilege of sexual reward. S/M at its best represents a remarkable convergence of civilized agreements and primitive urges. We believe it to be a very high achievement of the human body, mind and spirit.”

YES, BUT WHAT IS IT? We argued for hours as we worked on this book, and we weren’t able to come up with a definition that we thought accurately encompassed all of what we know as BDSM. Here, though, are some of the definitions we and our friends use and like.

A lot of folks use the phrase “consensual power exchange” to define S/M. We’re not entirely happy with this phrase – we think using the word “power,” that so often means nonconsensual force and coercion, can be misleading. In fact, what we do in S/M is that we *act as though* we were giving up or taking real-world power, while retaining the ability to keep as much power as we need to feel safe, or to take no more than we feel OK about having.

Another way of looking at BDSM – which unfortunately has many of the same problems – is to call it “negotiated codependence,” in which we can enjoy the pleasures of nurturance and control without harming ourselves or our bottoms.

Janet’s working definition of what we do is:

An activity in which the participants eroticize sensations or emotions that would be unpleasant in a non-erotic context.

We've heard some objections to the word "eroticize" in this definition – not everybody who does S/M connects their activities to genital sexuality. But we prefer to use the word "erotic" to refer to a wide spectrum of emotions and sensations that are arousing, awakening, enlightening and stimulating – whether or not they make your dick hard or your pussy wet.

Our friend Mic says:

S/M is what happens when the top takes more than the bottom offers, but less than the bottom is willing to give.

We think that this thought does a nice job of expressing the tension that often happens in good S/M – the "oh-my-god-this-is-terrible-please-don't-stop" energy that we all know and love.

Another good thought we've heard is:

S/M takes place when the top trades his or her energy for the bottom's armor.

All these definitions convey good information, but none of them seems to us adequate or comprehensive.

One thing we *do* know is that BDSM play is completely and qualitatively different from abuse. What we do bears the same relationship to abuse that consensual sex does to rape: a photograph of lovemaking might look exactly like a photo of a rape, but what is going on in the hearts and minds of the participants is entirely different. Hence, we say:

In S/M, the participants have one another's well-being as their paramount goal.

Some folks get confused because the fantasies they use to get turned on are not about consensual play. (Ours certainly

aren't!) If you feel disturbed by this seeming contradiction, let us remind you: everyone in your fantasy exists only inside your head. Since they are all aspects of yourself, they have all given their consent to be there. One of the characteristics that defines safe play is a recognition of the boundaries between our fantasies and our realities. A lot of this book will be devoted to helping clarify those boundaries.

In general, though, we'd say that if it feels like S/M to you, then it's probably S/M – or at least something close enough that you can learn more about it by reading on.

HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU'RE A TOP?

Many tops remember having top-py fantasies for as long as they can remember anything. It's not uncommon for a top to remember talking neighborhood kids into playing cops-and-robbers with lots of bondage, or teacher-and-student with lots of spanking. On the other hand, some people have their first top fantasies at puberty and some during young adulthood. Some excellent tops don't remember ever having had a top fantasy until a partner talked them into trying a light scene – and a whole new world opened up to them.

These fantasies may have caused the top lots of pain and worry. One top of our acquaintance recalls having his first bondage fantasy in the late '60s, shortly after the Tate/LaBianca murders – and spending anxious months worrying that he was turning into a mass murderer.

Janet remembers:

I can remember having top fantasies since very early childhood, but I was well into my twenties before I recognized that these diverting thoughts – which were obsessing me to the point of making it difficult for me to function in the real world – were actually

sexual in nature. And once I figured that out, it took me even longer to grasp that these marvelous, dirty, nonconsensual stories didn't have to stay fantasies, that there were people out there who would be interested in acting them out consensually with me.

So the easiest way to know if you're a top is to take a hard look at your fantasies. Being a dominant person in real life doesn't necessarily mean you're a top – many people who are hard-driving type As prefer to bottom. Nor does being a bit quiet and withdrawn in real life mean that you'll turn into Attila the Hun in scene.

On the other hand, if the idea of giving direction, taking control, inflicting strong sensation sends you into a panic, that doesn't necessarily mean you're *not* a top. Even the most experienced tops suffer from what performers call "flop sweat." The question is: while you're jittering at the very thought of topping, is your dick getting hard or your pussy getting wet?

If you've occasionally dreamed of somehow rendering your partner completely helpless so that you can wreak your wicked will on her... if you find yourself looking speculatively at the belt rack in the department store, and you're not thinking about holding your pants up.... or if the thought of someone kneeling naked at your feet as he serves you a nice cup of tea sounds like it might be, well, your cup of tea... guess what. You may already be a top.

DOES THERE ALWAYS HAVE TO BE A TOP AND A BOTTOM?

Well, no. Some people like to play scenes in which both (or all) players are receiving sensation: "nipple tug-of-war," in which two people both put on nipple clamps with chains running from one person to the other and lean backwards so that both sets of tits get a nice steady pull, is a good example. Some like scenes that involve power struggles, where nobody knows until someone

“wins” who the top will be. Still others like to switch in mid-scene.

It isn't always easy to tell who's the top and who's the bottom even in one-sided scenes. For example, if Janet orders Dossie to tie her up in a specific position and give her an exact number of cane strokes to the lower half of her butt... who's the top? Who's the bottom?

Nonetheless, it does seem to be true that the vast majority of BDSM play involves at least one discernible top and one discernible bottom. Outside a given scene, these two individuals may identify as the opposite role (many tops are excellent bottoms, and many bottoms are excellent tops).

The important thing to remember is that whether you're an experienced top or a novice, a bottom who'd like to switch or a bottom who'd never dream of switching, or a novice with a head full of tangled fantasies and some uncertainty about which string to pull to unravel them... there's something for you in this book. So read on!

2

WHAT *IS* IT ABOUT TOPPING, ANYWAY?

In the so-called “real world,” most of us constantly struggle with power, working to empower ourselves, and to protect ourselves from being overpowered by others. This is serious business.

But power can be sexy as well as serious. In S/M, we imitate the outward appearance of those grim real-world struggles for power, while building in the safeguards we need to keep us from being genuinely harmed. We believe that one purpose of S/M is to give us a way to enjoy the “upside” of power – its sexiness and drama – without bringing along its “downside.” We’ve heard people say, “S/M is power games for fun instead of profit,” and we agree.

BUILDING YOUR HEARTH. But isn’t this desire for power potentially destructive? Good question. We live in a culture of powermongers. We see all around us the ways in which power is misused to abuse those who lack the power to protect themselves. So how can we, as tops, justify wanting to get our rocks off feeling like the most powerful person of all?

The popular stereotype of an S/M top is of an amoral, irresponsible and destructive person: that's what you'll see in the movies. But in our world, we find that playing with power is like playing with fire: yes, there is the possibility of destruction if we are not careful... and there is also enormous potential for constructive heat that warms and heals.

One way we make it safe to play with fire is to build an adequate fireplace, a container, a hearth. We call it "scene space," and we'll tell you about building it later. Another way we make it safe is to become wise in the ways of power (in BDSM, we have lots of opportunity!). An ethical top understands power and wields it constructively, responsibly and safely.

IS ALL POWER THE SAME? From feminist theory we have learned to distinguish between power-over and power-with. Power-over is a behavior pattern in which a person measures personal power by his or her ability to control others – you increase your own power by stealing power from somebody else. You can see this dynamic anywhere you see rigid hierarchies or chains of command, like the military or the corporate ladder.

In our experience, if your goal is to build yourself a sense of empowerment and solid self-esteem, stealing power doesn't work very well. You can't build a solid sense of self-esteem by stealing someone else's. When people strive to empower themselves this way they behave like addicts, constantly scheming to replenish a supply of power that never was truly theirs.

On the other hand, there is power-with. Power-with enables us to get more power by sharing our power with others. The more I have, the more you have. By supporting one another in our power, we get more for ourselves.

In any S/M exchange there is a *sharing* of power – the bottom lends his power to the top for the duration, the top adds power, and together they make a *lot* of voltage. The top gets to

wield all this power, a form of extreme empowerment that is exciting, thrilling, hot, erotic, and, as we said before, very, very sexy.

So the first big payoff for topping is that we get to ride a whole lot of power, and to be, within the agreements and boundaries of a scene, enormously powerful.

SO WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU?

We asked a number of tops what rewards they found in topping – thanks to all of them for the following list. Remember, when you read a list of other people's turn-ons, some of them will work for you and others will not. Don't worry – hardly anybody could like every single thing on this list; there are certainly a few that we ourselves have not experienced.

- *Empathy.* Near the top of most people's lists is the "contact high," the turn-on we feel in empathy with the bottom's response to the physical, emotional and sexual intensity of the scene. One top describes this feeling as getting to surf the bottom's sensations.

It is certainly a truism of S/M that the bottom is on the receiving end of most of the stimulation. If empathy didn't work so well we wonder if anybody would get turned on to topping in the first place, or if we would all decide that topping is all work and no fun. But the happy truth is that we can indeed get intensely stimulated from what our partner is feeling. Both of us are amazed, after a few hours of highly technical topping, when we get to the part of the scene where the focus is on our orgasm, to experience an enormous orgasm (or several of them) – as if it had been building bigger and bigger inside us, just waiting for us to have the time to have it.

Empathy in BDSM presents a wonderful paradox: as tops in role, we are often called upon to present ourselves as cold, cruel and unfeeling, when in fact we are getting our rocks off on an empathy so profound that it can approach the telepathic. So we believe that, contrary to the opinions of the uninformed, consensual sadism, dominance and topping are primarily empathic activities.

- ***Creativity.*** Another frequently cited delight of topping is the opportunity for creativity. We get to be the playwright, the producer, the director and the lead actor all at once. We are presented with a lump of malleable clay – the bottom – with which we can create the sculpture of our fantasies. We get to enjoy our inventiveness, our resourcefulness, our competence and our flashes of genius. We get to exercise our intuition as we figure out what will get to this particular bottom, or how to get them where we want them. We get to have our fantasy our way, to play dolls with real people: for a while we get to make the world look just the way we want it to. We play God.
- ***Bigness.*** When we top we get to feel *big*. It may not be okay to act huge in ordinary social interactions, and you're usually not allowed to overwhelm people without their permission. When we top we put on a role that is about being important and powerful. And when our bottoms respond to us in our role as giants, when they offer us their trust, their adulation, and their belief in us as we see ourselves in our fantasies – when we see ourselves enormous in our bottoms' eyes, what a blazing hot mirror!

- *Nurturing.* Janet remembers some of her childhood fantasies in which she was doing really terrible things to very small people, so she could cradle them like dolls afterwards. Nurturing is a big part of much of what we do, and the combination of kindness and cruelty is one of the fastest ways to take a bottom down the deepest.

How does nurturing reward the top? Well, the nurturer, again, is big, and in play gets to be even bigger as we practice a kind of hyper-nurturance, enveloping our bottoms, almost as if we could engulf them. As nurturing tops we may play out the roles of Good Mommy or Good Daddy, maybe in a way we didn't get to experience in our childhood, so we get a chance to rewrite history. In scene space we can elicit and reenact trauma and also be the good parent who heals the wounds. Many of the most profound psychological scenes include intense nurturance. And in a world in which nurturing energy can be in short supply, it can be a delight to create an environment in which we get to taste a whole lot of it.

- *Bullying.* In **BDSM** we get to act out from parts of ourselves that could not be described as nice: the bully, the villain, the inquisitor, the brute, the betrayer. Wicked, wicked, wicked. And popular. Check out mainstream movies, or fiction from best-sellers to classical mythology, for verification that everybody adores a really good villain. Those bad guys are *big*. Big enough to

carry all the world's ills, and create all the pain and trouble a hungry bottom could want to suffer.

And what could be more forbidden than our own nastiness? Most of us learned things from our families and our culture, or perhaps from our more primitive and essential natures, that aren't very civilized. Many people view almost all relationships as interactions between victims and oppressors, so in topping we manifest our oppressor so the bottom can be in victim role, and both of us can have a powerful and erotic experience. S/M provides a safe way to be in the world for our internalized oppressor, the precious bully within.

- **Control.** Another powerful reward we get from topping is the opportunity to be in control. We can be control queens with permission – even encouragement. If you enjoy being served, the world seems like a much happier and calmer place when your morning cup of coffee is exactly the strength and temperature you prefer, with just the right amount of sugar and cream. And there's a keen joy in knowing that your needs and desires are echoing in your loved one's head, even when you're not there to express them.
- **Competence.** Many tops who used to be primarily bottoms report a strong motivation in the chance to *do it right*: if you've ever been on the bottom thinking about how that knot is too loose, and if you ran another rope from just *here* to over *there* then the tension on that thigh would be released and the legs would be held perfectly open, you'll understand some of the joys of control.

S/M is a technical sport, and a lot of us eroticize the chance to be competent, to generate perfectly balanced rope bondage, or an exquisitely timed sensory deprivation scene, or to choreograph a profound psychological journey. And when we do that well, we get to ride the scene and our bottoms – with our universe, for the moment, exactly as we want it. How gratifying.

- *Self-knowledge.* A familiar story – “helpless captive,” “shopping in the slave market,” “punishing the naughty boy,” those good old stories that snuggle us to sleep at night – can be the tip of the iceberg of profound psychological archetypes that we don’t see clearly, like a dream or a vision. Playing these roles out can be the way in which we clarify our vision, and developing an S/M persona can become the process by which we learn more about who we are. Then our bottom’s response becomes the mirror in which we see ourselves more clearly, and as we choreograph the bottom’s experience and stretch both of our limits in scene, we constantly create new mirrors in which we can see yet more. The possibilities are indeed endless.

WHAT ABOUT BOTTOMS?

If some of the above tickles your fancy, chances are you would enjoy topping. So what about bottoms? What do they get out of this? Why would a person want to be beaten, humiliated, ordered around and otherwise inconvenienced so that you can feel big? Well, because bottoming is very, very sexy too. There is tremendous luxury in giving up responsibility and power to a top, in being small, possibly childlike, in having your behavior

controlled, in getting nurtured while being subjected to all kinds of intense stimulations.

Fear can be arousing... the subjective experience of bondage can be so sensual as to approach a trance state... the chance to devote yourself to another's pleasure can soothe away your own cares... the controlled experience of pain in a safe and consensual scene can be tremendously rewarding.

Many of our activities enable us to use our bodies' ability to produce naturally occurring morphine-like neurotransmitters called "endorphins" in response to intense stimuli. In *The New Bottoming Book* we described in detail how sensations can be processed through the body to create an endorphin high, and how ecstatic experiences of intensity and openness transmute strong physical and emotional sensation into an altered state of consciousness that we experience as extreme pleasure.

Other rewards of bottoming include getting lots of attention, as well as acting out fantasies of helplessness and other forbidden emotions (needy, pathetic, dependent, guilt-ridden) that, like their toppish counterparts, would cause lots of trouble in the real world.

HOW ARE TOPS AND BOTTOMS INTERRELATED?

So tops and bottoms are interdependent – we need each other to play out our fantasy roles as well as to perform the physical acts that make us so happy. Bottoms need tops to push them off cliffs so they can fly, and tops need bottoms so they can ride the same winds, and that's how both can have their dreams come true. This is obvious... but the fantasies we play with are not necessarily obvious.

The nature of the dance of BDSM tends to polarize our roles to a greater extent than might be possible or healthy in the rest of our lives. Play pushes both top and bottom out to the far ends of the spectrum. Each player, in traveling further out,

supports the other in going yet further. Thus as a wonderful scene progresses, the bottoms get smaller, the tops get bigger, and the larger the territory we encompass: we move to the outer ends of the spectrum, generating something like centrifugal force, spinning further and further out while holding each other safe and tight.

WHOSE FANTASY?

We want to mention here that not all scenes are based on fantasies, and especially not on fantasies that have detailed scripts or stories. Often the scene is based on an image, a feeling, an emotion, or a specific activity like bondage or flogging or anal sex.

One question that comes up when we actually sit down to negotiate a scene is whose fantasy are we playing, the top's or the bottom's? The answer is either, or both, or whatever the two of you together decide will work the best. Some bottoms are not comfortable talking about their fantasies for fear of seeming too directive, but we believe that it is a requirement for a skilled and supportive bottom to be able to tell you about her desires – as a top, you need some information to figure out what will make this scene work.

Good tops learn to support bottoms through the embarrassment of revealing their fantasies – and isn't embarrassment one of those hot forbidden emotions we love to play with? *Force* that shy little thing to tell you what she wants!

Similarly, tops need to learn to speak comfortably about their fantasies and desires. As we'll see when we talk about negotiation, tops don't just walk up to bottoms and do whatever comes to mind. Scenes are negotiated, and constructed to satisfy both bodies and imaginations while remaining within the limits of both top and bottom. And to find out if your fantasy is within

your bottom's limits, you have to discuss it at least enough to establish those limits (everybody enjoys a surprise, but it's not kosher to tattoo "Kilroy Was Here!" on your friend's ass without permission).

Some tops feel they lose authority as a top when they agree to play all or part of a bottom's fantasy, and are offended by the idea that they may be "servicing" the bottom. We think it's inappropriate to get your ego invested in your bottom's having no desire but to please you, or no ideas of his own. We would be equally critical of a bottom who didn't want to hear about the top's desires and needs, or was not interested in trying out his fantasy.

New players often start out with one fantasy they have desired and elaborated on for years, while more seasoned tops and bottoms may enjoy many roles in many scenarios. So when we play out a bottom's fantasy we have little to lose and lots to gain. When we stretch to realize someone else's story, we get to enlarge our repertoire, learn new skills, and perhaps discover yet more ways to get turned on. Sounds like a win-win situation to us.

So we see no need to compete over whose game we are playing – we'd rather play your wonderful ideas tonight and mine tomorrow, regardless of who's in charge. Once again, we see this as a collaborative endeavor, in which we play with power that is shared, for the pleasure and benefit of all parties in the game.

SYMBOLISM AND STRUCTURE

As Sir Stephen remarked in *The Story of O*, we are indeed fond of rituals. BDSM is often characterized by a certain formality or ritual quality that reminds us of opera gowns, dress uniforms, nuns' habits and other formal signifiers.

That's because play is to a very real degree about symbolism. The "kidnapping" we do for erotic pleasure reflects an arousing fantasy (since in our fantasy, the kidnappers do exactly what we

want), and when we play we make sure the “kidnappers” are actually doing exactly what we want, a ritual of helplessness in the face of overwhelming stimulus. An actual kidnapping, with no concern for the feelings of the victim, would be a life-shattering reality. The symbol enables us to confront our simultaneous fear of, and attraction to, the genuine horrors of the world. But we need form and structure to clarify the distinction between the symbol and the thing itself.

The structure we build around our play creates a “firewall,” a boundary that enables us to take vague and abstract ideas, emotions, roles and dynamics and pull them upwards into reality, where we can explore them and get turned on by them. We learn a lot about what the limits are, and where the boundaries are between scene space and the rest of our lives.

Wise players study the play of those who have gone before us, just as art students study the Old Masters (interesting choice of name, don’t you think?). By building on the foundations that others have developed, we can build taller and stronger fireplaces for our flames so they can leap higher, hotter and safer.

Sometimes costumes help define our structure, telling us what role we’re playing – both from the archetypes expressed (cop, pirate, doctor) and by the function of the garments (the daddy’s belt, the vampire’s fangs, the goddess’s sky-high heels). These symbols are also a reminder that the top has made a commitment to remain aware, contained, in control of both partners – that she has agreed not to fall down on the floor and thrash in ecstasy until it is safe and consonant to do so. The bottom may not dress at all, indicating vulnerability and availability, or may have his essential nakedness accentuated by symbols like collars or corsets, or by clothes which can be removed by the top as part of a spiritual and physical stripping away of defenses.

Bondage, even symbolic bondage such as a loop of thread holding thumbs together, creates a structure which controls the bottom's behavior and defines roles. So are the names which we call one another – “sir” and “boy,” “mistress” and “slave,” “milady” and “sirrah,” “Spot” and “woof woof!”

Sometimes our structure is defined by logistics: time, physical abilities, environments. We enter the dungeon and become our “other selves,” then leave it and become our day-to-day selves again. Our time agreements may be our form: we'll play until 3:00, then go get something to eat. Or we may agree to play until one or the other or both of us has had an orgasm, or has reached some mutually agreed upon level of stimulation.

All these structures are there to help you get as big as you can, and your bottom as small as he can, while ensuring your safe return to your normal size when you need to go back. Like Alice's looking glass, they enable you to wander safely through the topsy-turvy dreamscapes of fantasy, where pain is pleasure and cruelty is love.

3

WHAT DO TOPS DO?

FINDING YOUR TOP PERSONA. As a top, you might be a sadistically vicious interrogator, or a sweetly sorrowful parent who's only spanking this naughty boy for his own good. You could be a mad scientist out of a horror film, an eight-year-old girl blackmailing her babysitter, Simon Legree, the Phantom of the Opera, or the evil caliph keeping his harem in order. You could be Captain Bligh, Captain Picard, Captain Hook, Captain America or even Captain Kangaroo, because the ways to be a top are limited only by your imagination.

Most of our fantasies come from very deep places inside us – Janet blushes to admit that she still has top-py fantasies about the villains on the old campy “Batman” TV show that aired in her impressionable adolescence. We draw our fantasies from the powerful archetypes found in popular culture, like movies and TV shows; from the real-world torture and rape that simultaneously fascinate and horrify us; from well-thumbed

reminiscences of our own childhoods – in short, from almost any place our monkey curiosity carries us.

Fantasies are seldom sophisticated, ambiguous or even very pretty. They almost never contain negotiation or safewords (these are “safety nets” that get built into our real-world play to help make our fantasies safer to enact). For these reasons, and because we know that wanting to hurt, control or humiliate people is not OK, we may feel very ashamed or embarrassed about our fantasies. But once we overcome that embarrassment, and discover how many other people have similar feelings, our fantasy world becomes a hot and happy playground.

During one of our play dates, we originally had no particular scenario in mind. But during the one-hour drive between our houses, Janet was idly fantasizing about being the matron in a Victorian workhouse full of girl orphans. With no small embarrassment, she shared that fantasy with Dossie over lunch. Dossie happened to be wearing a sundress that made her look about fourteen, and the roles and scenario fell easily into place from there: Dossie became the new little orphan recently brought into the workhouse, and “Miss Janet, ma’am” spent a happy couple of hours showing her “how things is done around ’ere,” and demonstrating the dreadful canings she would get if she ever misbehaved.

Advertising people refer to radio as “theater of the mind,” because a few well-chosen words and sound effects are all it takes to create an entire scenario inside the head of the listener. We think S/M is theater of the mind, too. It’s a rare treat when you can set up a scene with full props and costumes and dialogue; more often, a couple of items – a dashing hat, say, or a flogger that looks like something Basil Rathbone might have used on

Errol Flynn – is all it takes to create and maintain an illusion. And, as the top, you get to be playwright, set designer, costume designer, director and audience.

DO YOU ALWAYS HAVE TO HAVE A ROLE? A lot of our best S/M scenes have been done without recourse to any particular role – we’re not Harriet Marwood or Ming the Merciless, we’re simply us.

Still, any given scene has a “flavor” that can often be described by describing a role. A harsh scene in which limits get pushed, in which the top acts as though she really doesn’t care what happens to the bottom, may have the flavor of a torture or interrogation scene. A very nurturing scene, in which the top is giving the bottom a lot of “there, there, you can take just a *little* more” messages, may have more of a nice-mommy or nice-daddy flavor.

A lot of people are bashful about overt role-playing, and others simply aren’t turned on by it – it seems false to them. But, just as a role-playing scene where the bottom wants to be a horsie and the top wants to be Superman is likely to run into problems, a scene where one partner wants to humiliate and the other wants to be nurtured is probably not going to work too well. So even if you’re not into playing your roles overtly, it’s important to be clear about what flavor of scene you want. And when we talk in this book about a “daddy scene” or an “interrogation scene,” we may be talking about a scene with overt roles, props and dialogue, or we may be describing the overall flavor of the scene.

WHERE ARE THE BOUNDARIES?

As you can see, many of the roles in this book reflect real-world power relationships of various intensities. Because we are eroticized to power, we may begin to feel that we

want our play to be more and more “real” – to creep closer to the edge where the realities of consent and power begin to blur.

S/M folk sometimes describe people who play in that blurry area as “edge players.” But we think *all* players are edge players.

We’re all playing in a topsy-turvy world where pain equals pleasure, where fear equals arousal, where “no! no!” equals “YES!!!” Each of us may be, in our own way, trying to define the boundary where our bottoms’ enjoyment of “not wanting something” turns into *really* not wanting it, and trying to explore and, perhaps, alter that boundary. The player whose play seems so light that you wouldn’t even define it as S/M is an edge player when she is in her own way doing something that’s difficult or scary or painful, in an attempt to turn the unacceptable into the erotic: playing at his or her edge.

Janet once did a scene with a novice bottom:

He’d never played at all before, and so I set his first scene up to be *very* lightweight: I tied him to the bed, blindfolded him, and simply gave him mild, sensuous sensations with different textures – fur, leather, my fingernails and so on – all over his body. If you’d asked me beforehand, I’d have told you such a scene would not be much of a turn-on for me; I was doing it as a favor to him. But as I caressed him, he began to release some deep emotions: he giggled, he writhed, he sobbed... he was just one great big live nerve ending. And I found that I was getting *very* turned on, because while the sensations I was giving him weren’t much, they were eliciting such powerful and primal responses from him. He was getting stroked with a scrap of fur, but it was edge play for him – and that made it edge play for me too.

We deplore what Dossie has dubbed “the hierarchy of hip about heaviness.” In this form of craziness, a player whose forays into branding/bullwhips/whatever have been only moderately successful is deemed superior to one whose light spankings or erotic bondage sessions have left his or her partner glowing like a 200-watt bulb. To us, the only criterion for good play is: did everyone involved get what they wanted from it? If the answer to that question is “yes,” the session gets an automatic A-plus – whether it was a handspanking or a needle suspension.

We know one player whose mantra is “This is not a contest. This is not a contest” – repeated to himself every time he begins to try to exceed another player’s accomplishments. We think this is a good mantra for us all.

SAFESWORDS. A safeword is a word agreed upon by the players in a scene that means stop, there’s a problem, we need to change something, something isn’t working, someone’s in trouble. We establish a code word because many of us become incoherent when we are very excited – we recommend safewords that are short and easy to pronounce when breathing hard. We use code because many scenes are based on a fantasy of nonconsent, and yelling “nononononono” may be part of the script.

Tops safeword too. Dossie tells the story of a time when she safeworded out of a major scene:

My lover had wanted me to brand her for a long time, and we had planned, collected information, researched everybody else’s experience and our own personal symbolism, and set up to do a ritual branding. We lived in the country, and had invited friends to come down to support this event, so there were witnesses. I had been practicing branding and felt somewhat insecure about my facility with the procedure, but spent the morning up in the ring of

redwood trees over a very hot hibachi gamely branding slices of potato and turkey parts until I felt I could touch her with hot metal and not burn all the way through her. During this time, the houseguests were keeping her amused, and when we started up she was already entranced. Our ritual included a flogging to bring up the endorphins before the actual branding, but when I started to flog her it became apparent that something was wrong. Nothing I did seemed to be right for her, a very gentle stroke was too hard, she was not comfortable and neither was I. She wanted to go ahead anyway, but I decided that I could not brand her when I couldn't make connection, and that there was no way that I was going to put a serious and permanent mark on her body when things were feeling unpleasant. So I safeworded, big bad brander that I am. I felt like an idiot. Here we had brought all these people together and I had chickened out. And my lover wasn't happy about it, and it took awhile to bring her back down onto the planet from her tranced-out space – it was dire. I must have apologized forty or fifty times to our guests, who were very supportive and reassuring, bless their hearts. I reminded myself over and over, as I remind you now: it is possible, actually not very difficult, to have an experience of extreme public embarrassment, live through it, and be fine afterwards. Which we were. I now think the first time was a rehearsal, and perhaps we both needed to know that we could back out. About a month later, we got together with two friends and pulled the branding off without a hitch, and with much delight.

Whenever a player safewords, this is an occasion for mutual support. We understand that nobody safewords from a happy place, and that all of our egos feel frail and kind of runty when we need to back out of a scene. It is completely unethical to respond with scorn or ridicule to a person who has safeworded: S/M is not a competition, we are not playing against each other.

As tops, we have noticed that if we are having a good time and our bottom safewords, our initial feelings may not be happy. Whaddaya mean you don't like that? I do all this work and you don't appreciate it? I'm hot for being in control and you want me to stop? We have felt real anger and felt challenged in our top role... and, on a deeper level, we have felt put down, hurt and rejected. It is okay to have these feelings. It is not okay to act on them. Take three deep breaths and everybody start taking care of each other.

Sometimes bottoms get so deeply engaged in a scene that they fail to safeword, or forget, or so profoundly believe in the fantasy that it doesn't occur to them: many of the techniques we play with, like interrogation, function in the real world to undermine volition. Dossie remembers a scene in which a top offered her a choice of something or other: "I felt very confused. Some distant part of me vaguely remembered having made choices, but the response from my state of consciousness at that time was, Choose? I am not a thing that chooses." So then what is the top's responsibility?

If a bottom does not safeword and you don't pick up on what's going on, and this *will* happen if you play long enough and well enough, there is no blame. However, it is still your responsibility to monitor for physical safety as best you can. As ethical tops we make a commitment to never knowingly harm our bottoms. To this end we check in regularly to make sure that things are going the way we think they are, and we constantly monitor the physical and emotional safety of our bottoms. If a

bottom is beyond safewording, and you as the top feel unsure about how far you should go, it is your responsibility to slow down or stop the scene and get into communication with the bottom to make sure you have informed consent. If you have to bring the bottom back into reality to do this, please remember that you helped get them into that altered state in the first place, so presumably you can help get them back there again as soon as you are sure of what's going on.

And just because someone safeworded doesn't mean that the scene has to be over. There may be times when the problem that brought either of you to safeword is so overwhelming that carrying on doesn't feel like the right thing right now – but most often we find that after we've dealt with whatever the difficulty is, we're still terrifically turned on, with the added bonus of a shared intimacy.

WHEN YOU ITCH TO GO FURTHER. Many of us find that the more we play, the closer we want to come to the gray area between “enough” and “too much,” between consent and nonconsent. These desires may grow so strong that we feel that we're craving genuinely nonconsensual play – that we really do want to kidnap a stranger or whip a slave or punish a child.

We will assume that you who are reading this book are not about to do any such thing: if you feel that you are in danger of actually harming someone, please seek help from a therapist or counselor right away. But when you're feeling frustrated by partners who want to stop before you're ready to, or who don't want to play the way you want to, it's easy to let the fantasies grow so strong that they begin to seem like realities. The good news is that, with patience, skill, mutual knowledge and trust, and sometimes a bit of compromise, there are usually ways to indulge those desires without harming, alienating or losing your partner.

We suggest that you spend a little time thinking objectively, if you can, about the fantasies that are driving your desire to push limits. In your fantasy, what is the turn-on? How can you tell, for example, that the bottom has been driven past limits? Is she begging, crying, screaming? Is there physical evidence – blood, urine, tears?

When you have a pretty clear picture of what that turn-on looks like to you, you get to the embarrassing part: describing it to your partner. You may find, to your surprise, that your bottom has been having similar fantasies, and needs only your permission to go into the headspace you've both been craving. (Begging for mercy, for example, is difficult for many bottoms, who may be worried that they will beg so effectively that you'll actually stop. Knowing that you're willing to keep going unless you hear a safeword can feel very freeing.) Or your bottom may be willing to play-act the fantasy in the way that turns you on – he may find that the role starts to seem very real and very arousing once he gives it a try.

We sometimes meet tops and bottoms who want to do scenes without safewords, reasoning that it is impossible to “really” push limits when the bottom can stop the scene anytime she wants to. A safeword is simply a code we use to communicate the status of consent. Responsible tops play consensually – the safeword is your safety net, to let you know that's what you're doing.

In our experience, the most common problem is the opposite one: bottoms who earnestly hang in there way beyond their limits and safeword too late rather than too soon. But remember – bottoms are there with you because they want to explore their limits, and they, not you, are the best judges of where those limits are. The safest and most growthful way to expand limits is with time, trust and practice: as partners play together and learn more about each other's communications style and physical limitations, they tend to use encoded safewords less

and less frequently. But even partners who have been together for years need safewords to signal the rare but critical situations where one partner or the other has a genuine physical or emotional emergency such as illness, injury, unexpected rage, age regression and the like.

IF YOU'RE DOING IT, IT'S "REAL"

Both of us cringe, and have been known to get a bit snappish, when we hear phrases that start with "real" or "true" – "real submissive," "true Master" and so on. When you hear someone say one of those phrases, we suggest you mentally translate them into what they really mean – "someone who plays in a way I approve of." Usually, the next thing we hear is that so-and-so is not a "real" top or not "truly" submissive. Ick.

Often, people who dismiss others as not being "real" are expressing scorn for limits which are both real and realistic, and which exist (acknowledged or unacknowledged) in all safe play. When you set yourself up an unattainable ideal role, and subtract points from your estimation of your friends and yourself whenever anyone falls short of that ideal, we think you are setting yourself up for a lot of disappointment.

The player who does a light session twice a year is doing something extremely "real" – she is giving away or taking as much power as feels safe, healthy and sexy to him or her. So is the most extreme 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week owner and slave couple.

S/M is about contradiction, about paradox. A bottom who is (or pretends to be) without desires, fantasies or power is an unsafe and unhealthy bottom. A top who is (or pretends to be) without vulnerability, compromise or connection is an unsafe and unhealthy top.

If you can't understand these paradoxes – the ways in which symbolic powerlessness can empower and symbolic cruelty can

sensitize – please sit down and think them through carefully. We hope that when you’re through thinking, you’ll realize how destructive concepts like “real dominant” and “true slave” can be, and discover the far greater joys that lie in play in which everybody’s needs and wants are acknowledged, honored and enjoyed.

interlude 1

A sensation scene at a party, played by Janet and a female friend.

B. and I are close friends, but had played together before only once, in a very limited way; this would be our first full-on scene together. We are both het-identified bi women, both experienced players, and while we're both switches, she is more comfortable in the bottom role. I knew from our discussions ahead of time that she enjoyed flagellation of all kinds, particularly on her butt, and that she was fond of play piercing and of both vaginal and anal penetration. While she is comfortable with dominant/submissive roleplay, she doesn't need it to enjoy straight sensation play; since it isn't a preference of mine, we decided to pass on any kind of mental control and simply go for the "high" of strong sensation. We agreed on safewords and were ready to go.

We arrived at the party somewhat early, so we had our choice of bondage equipment. To start out, we chose a large cable-spool table, padded with vinyl and surrounded by handles. B. told me that bondage makes her feel uncomfortably confined and that she would prefer simply to be told to hold still. She hopped onto the table and I told her to lie face down, placing a thick pad of paper towels under her pussy to keep her juices off the equipment. I unfastened her garters and took down her stockings, but left her corset in place; her butt was my target for this part of the evening.

I started out with a heavy soft suede flogger and began gently flogging her butt and upper thighs. I could tell she was hardly feeling these strokes, but I built them up fairly slowly anyway, swinging overhand from her left side, then from her right. By the time the strokes got fairly hard, she was beginning to get turned on, arching her butt up to meet the suede and moaning loudly. I moved down to her feet and pulled them apart to spread her legs, then began flogging her butt from below in a figure-eight configuration, quite hard. Her response grew vivid enough that I was pretty sure she'd come if I kept it up, and I didn't want that to happen yet. So I finished with a few more strokes and switched to a harsher, stingier braided cat, using the same pattern of first from the left side, then from the right, then in a figure-eight from below. I thought that this sensation would be more painful and less sexual for her, and judging from her reaction, it was... but she was obviously still having a good time. (It was somewhere around this time that I moved up to her head to see how she was doing, and she saw that I was laughing and began to get a little uptight, thinking that I was laughing at her. I said, "No, I'm just laughing because you're so unbelievably fucking wonderful.")

I wanted her next sensation to be solidier, not as spread out as the multi-tailed implements I'd been using so far. I got out a heavy leather strap and began swinging that from the side. She was obviously working pretty hard to handle that sensation; she started rolling from side to side to avoid the blows, so I used my left hand to press the small of her back down toward the table while I whipped with my right. I wasn't sure if being held down physically would trigger her aversion to bondage, so I watched her reactions carefully. It seemed OK, and I was enjoying it, so I kept it up. The sensation of the strap didn't seem to be turning her on much, though, and I wanted to keep her sexual arousal high. I put a glove on my right hand and lubed a couple of fingers and began to explore her asshole. One finger went in effortlessly, and so did two. She was moaning and wriggling against my fingers – OK, great. I got a medium-sized butt plug out of my bag, stretched a condom over it, lubed it up, and inserted it. It went in with no difficulty at

all, and she reacted with dramatic and visible arousal. I resumed strapping her, pausing to wiggle the plug a bit whenever the balance between pain and arousal seemed to be tipping too far.

Next I got out an experiment – a birch rod (a bundle of long whippy birch switches bound together at the handle and spreading out into a broomlike spray). She'd never felt a birch before, and I'd only used one a couple of times before, so we weren't sure how this would work out. Since she'd been reacting more positively to thuddy toys than to stingy ones, my guess was that she'd have a hard time with something as stingy as the birch. I started hitting her ass with it. She went quite still, her back arched, hands braced against the table and shoulders and head up. Obviously I'd guessed right – this was a tough sensation for her. But she rose to the challenge. I went a little harder. Her face was working with the effort to process the sensation. I was enjoying birching her a lot, but I wanted this scene to be more about pleasure/pain than straight pain, so I didn't push it too hard. I rubbed and massaged her butt a bit to diffuse the sting, and told her she'd been great.

Time for something more fun. I took out a clublike rod of heavy Teflon – a thuddy instrument that has to be used extremely carefully, since it could break bones with a missed or overly hard blow. I tried a couple of not-too-hard strokes on her lower butt and she began to moan almost immediately. I hit a bit harder and she began to writhe. Experimentally, I tapped the base of the butt plug with the club a couple of times and she began to act like she was about to come, so I grabbed the plug and began to wiggle and thrust it. She came almost immediately, loudly and enthusiastically. I alternated hitting her with the club and getting her off with the plug a couple more times until she was panting and limp.

At last, the grand finale – the canes, which I knew were her favorite and mine. I started with my lightest cane, a medium-width whippy rattan one. I gave her one trial moderate-strength stroke, and when I saw her reaction I knew we were onto something. I hit harder, mostly giving her about fifteen seconds between strokes to process the sensation, but

occasionally making her work harder by giving her two or even three in quick succession. Her moans were low-pitched and the motion of her hips told me that she was finding the cane strokes erotic. But she'd taken quite a bit by now, and since I didn't really know too much about how well her body recovered from heavy beatings, I didn't want to push my luck, so I began to think about winding the session down.

I switched to a different cane – a manmade one, a bit thicker and quite a bit heavier in weight. I gave her a dozen or so blows with it, walking from one side of the table to the other between strokes so that she had plenty of time to work with the sensation. I reached for the butt plug again, manipulating it with my right hand and pressing against her pubic mound with my left, bringing her to one final giant orgasm. Then I told her she could choose a number between two and ten to receive with the heavy cane, and then we'd be done. She chose four. I gave them to her as hard as she could take, and felt the endorphins rush in her and me as she stretched to meet my challenge. And then the scene was over.

We both got caught up in a tremendous fit of the giggles, composed of equal parts, I think, of endorphins, relief and triumph (we'd done it!). I got up on the table with her and held her and we smooched and giggled for a while. When she felt ready to get up, I helped her off the table and swept the toys any old which way into the bag (I could always reorganize them later) and went back out into the social area looking for food and drink. We spent the next hour or so cuddling, nibbling, chatting and watching other scenes together.

The next morning, before I had a chance to call her to see how she was doing, I found an e-mail waiting for me raving about what a wonderful time she'd had and how colorful her backside was looking. It felt great to receive it.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

“It is always wrong to wield power if you are not prepared to accept the consequences for your actions and do the work it takes to use your strength and authority with precision and fairness. A good leader is many people’s servant. If being trained to become a perfect servant sounds too humiliating, you are not strong enough to withstand the temptations of wielding power.”¹

Lighting up dark places – your own and your bottom’s – is a tremendous responsibility and a tremendous turn-on. While you may top *playfully*, you should never do so *frivolously*; your partner’s physical and emotional well-being, and your own, are on the line. This chapter is about the kinds of responsibility you are agreeing to take on when you decide to top, and about the kinds of rewards you have a right to expect in return.

1. Pat Califia

THE TOP'S BILL OF RIGHTS

We the players of the BDSM communities, in order to form more perfect scenes, establish arousal, ensure domestic titillation, provide for mutual support, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of sadomasochism to ourselves and our play partners, do ordain and establish this Bill of Rights for dominants, sadists and all those who put their self-image and reputation on the line to get themselves and their partners off.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO CLEAR COMMUNICATION.

Before, during and after your play, you are entitled to receive as much information about your partner's needs, wants and limits as he is capable of giving you. He doesn't get to withhold information for fear of scaring you off, to exaggerate his abilities, or to pretend not to have limits (we *all* have limits). On the other hand, he can't share information he doesn't have; novices may not know much about their limits, but can still probably tell you quite a bit about their fantasies. Asking you to top without as much information as you can get is like asking a contractor to build a house without seeing the blueprint.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO EXPECT SUPPORT FROM YOUR PARTNER – WHETHER YOU'RE IN SCENE SPACE OR OUT OF IT. As we sit here writing this chapter, we're looking in our crystal ball, and it tells us that you're going to make mistakes. We wish the lottery were this easy to predict.

When those inevitable mistakes happen, you have the right to expect that your partner will work with you to help correct the situation promptly and efficiently, so that the two of you can go on playing – or, if things have gone too far awry to finish that particular scene, to go on being friends and to play again another time. Unless your screwup is malicious or unforgivably careless,

you have the right to mutual non-blaming – to the assumption that you were doing your best and simply made an error.

And you have a right to your partner's friendship and support at those times when you don't feel like being a top: sometimes we all need simply to be held, sympathized with, taken out to lunch, or maybe even to get some pain or bondage for ourselves – and a bottom who withdraws from you the minute you take off your fetish gear or put down your whip isn't supporting those very human and essential needs.

YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO BE NURTURED. People's needs for nurturance vary widely, but most of us need to feel taken care of at least sometimes – even, perhaps especially, tops. We remember a scene we did together:

In this scene, Dossie was a prom queen, all in taffeta and rhinestones, and Janet was the street hood who kidnaps her from the prom at knifepoint to torture and rape her. It was a *very* hot scene, played at a party in front of dozens of eager spectators. Janet found herself becoming a very scary "hoodlum," conscienceless and full of anger, and the scene became charged with frightening, sinister – and very hot – energy. After duly binding, stripping, beating, torturing and fucking Dossie, Janet held her and brought her nicely back down to earth. Then we went upstairs for something to eat. In the food room, Janet, who was by this point trembling and a bit weepy, sat at Dossie's feet and said plaintively, "Could you just *pet* me for a while, please?" Dossie stroked Janet's hair and rubbed her neck

and shoulders until Janet felt quite sure that Dossie wasn't still seeing her as the nasty hoodlum, and still accepted and liked her after experiencing such a dark and shadowy self.

The moral is that accessing your shadow, as a top or as a bottom, can put you into a state of tremendous emotional vulnerability, and you may need lots of nurturing and acceptance while you are in that state. If you're not getting the kind of nurturing you want, you should ask for it – needing to be taken care of does not make you less of a top, it makes you more of a human being.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO GET YOUR NEEDS MET. A footrub? A sinkful of clean dishes? An earful of shrieks? An orgasm? Whatever it is that you need to feel like topping has been worthwhile for you, you're entitled to get that (the reverse, of course, is also true – your bottom has the right to expect to get his or her needs met as well).

But you can't expect your bottom to read your mind. If you like to hear begging, for example, say so – your bottom may have previously played with a top who insisted on stoical silence, and only be doing what she thinks is right. Some tops may have come of age in a milieu where genital sex is an expected part of S/M, and be dismayed and annoyed by a bottom who doesn't automatically work to get his or her top off – others could be outraged by a bottom who tries to get inside their leathers without express direction. You have to ask if you expect to get.

It sounds obvious to say that a top should tell his or her bottom how to meet his or her needs – after all, isn't that what a top does? But we've found it isn't necessarily that simple: asking for what you really want, particularly if it isn't part of a standard S/M scenario, can feel vulnerable and embarrassing. All we can tell you about that is that the payoff is, or should be, worth the

vulnerability: that a scene where you and your bottom both get your needs met is almost certain to be more satisfying for both of you, and to lead to more and hotter scenes later.

YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO RESPONSIVENESS. Very few tops enjoy pouring their energy and toppiness into a bottom who's so stoical that they can't tell whether or not he's enjoying it. When we top, we enjoy a bottom who gives us lots of hot sexy screaming, moaning, trembling and/or writhing, preferably with a wet pussy or hard dick for reinforcement. Other tops like watching a bottom struggle to maintain composure under stress (although a bottom who maintained composure *too* perfectly probably wouldn't be very much fun to play with). Again, ask for what you want.

You also have a right to verbal response during the scene if you want it. When we ask "How are you doing?" or "Is this working for you?," we all like to hear answers in the affirmative. However, *always* getting an affirmative answer, or getting an affirmative answer in the face of evidence to the contrary (wrap marks on a belly, for example), leaves us clueless, foundering and frustrated. If having a bottom chirp "Pardon me, sir or ma'am, but could you hit a little lower, please?" seems disrespectful to you, tell him or her to ask permission to speak first – and, upon receiving it, to give you the information you need. (We like to thank our bottoms when they give us important information.)

YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK. At some point within a day or two after your scene, you and your bottom will probably want to do some talking about how it went – what worked and didn't work for you and for her, what you might like to do differently next time, and an overview of how the scene was for both of you. During this "debriefing" – which we think is essential to both your

relationship with your partner and your growth as a top – you have a right to helpful, constructive criticism. Your bottom should tell you about anything that didn't go well in such a way that you know how you can do it more successfully next time, and she should also tell you about the stuff that *did* go well, giving you lots of nice ego strokes along the way. Similarly, any feedback you have for your bottom also needs to be supportive and constructive. A bottom who blames you for your mistakes, tears down your performance without offering constructive suggestions, or shuts down and simply won't tell you what his or her experience was like, is not a bottom we suggest you play with twice.

THE TOP'S LIST OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Like all rights, top's rights carry a burden of responsibility. Here are some of the responsibilities we think you take on when you agree to top:

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR KNOWING AND STATING YOUR NEEDS, WANTS AND LIMITS. When you're pretending to be Attila the Hun, Scourge of the Dungeon, it can be easy to forget that tops have limits too. But doing scenes that make you feel incompetent or disgusted or like a bad person is a really good way to lose track of the fact that we're supposed to be having fun here, and to burn yourself out.

Everybody has needs, wants and limits. If you're new at this, you may discover some of yours by tripping over them – by doing a scene and discovering that you feel just awful, either because of something you did that you shouldn't have, or because of something you didn't do that you should have. But even if you're an old hand, your limits may change over time: Janet spent years with a strong limit around breaking skin during play, but then discovered play piercing and started sticking needles into her friends every chance she gets.

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR FOLLOWING THROUGH ON YOUR PROMISES. When your play date is coming up, you may hear a chorus of “yahbut” voices in your head – “Yah, but I’m not feeling topdy.” “Yah, but I didn’t get a good night’s sleep last night.” “Yah, but I’ve got a lot to do afterwards and I don’t want to tire myself out.” “Yah, but what if I fuck up?” While we understand that pre-scene nervousness (which is often the part of you that’s literally “scared of your own shadow” – see Chapter 15) can be daunting, bottoms are driven insane by tops who promise playdates and don’t follow through; this sort of approach/avoidance behavior is unfair and irresponsible.

If you’re feeling like you want to cancel or no-show on a playdate, please don’t, unless your reasons are excellent. Go, and use some of the suggestions you’ll read in Chapter 9 to help yourself get turned on and into top space. We don’t think you’ll regret it.

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR OWN AND YOUR PARTNER’S PHYSICAL SAFETY. Your bottom may or may not be able to tell you if something you’re doing is causing physical harm. She may be so high on endorphins that he simply can’t tell what’s happening, or may have gotten non-verbal and forgotten how to communicate. If you’re not sure whether or not your bottom is able to communicate, you’ll have to take the responsibility for initiating the communication. Questions like “How are your hands feeling?” or “Some of these strokes seem to be causing some bruises; is that OK?” or “Are you getting dizzy?” are perfectly all right, and if your bottom doesn’t want to answer them, you should probably order her to.

Janet did a scene once where her top did a good job of taking care of her physical safety:

We were at a costume party where I was wearing a dress made out of imitation chain mail with nothing

underneath – so I'd been sitting on a rough surface all night. I got naked, and my friend started spanking me with his hand, then with a hairbrush. I was having a swell time and could happily have gone on all night... but suddenly he stopped, said, "I think you're losing some hide here," and ended the scene (against my vociferous protests). But sure enough, when I got home that evening, one cheek of my ass bore a large raw blister that took several weeks of cleaning and bandaging to heal properly. If my friend had kept on going as I demanded, the combination of the rough chain mail and the heavy spanking might have done serious damage to my skin – and I'd never have known it until it was too late.

Sobriety is also important. While different players' standards vary – some folks feel OK about very light use of intoxicants in scene, while others do not – it is certain that if you are too stoned or drunk to drive a car or go to work, you should not be playing. We urge extreme conservatism in the use of intoxicants during any kind of sex, and most especially during BDSM: there is probably nothing you do that demands better judgment and emotional balance, and using chemicals to impair those qualities strikes us as a very bad idea. Besides, why on earth would you want to blur such a wonderful experience?

Safer sex is a subset of physical safety. Part of safeguarding your bottom's, and your own, physical well-being is making sure that neither of you takes anything away from the session that you don't want – an unplanned pregnancy or a nuisance infection or a deadly disease. Opinions change monthly as to how risky various sexual and S/M activities are in terms of disease transmission; we urge conservatism – when in doubt, use a latex or polyurethane barrier. Don't assume that your partner's

definition of safer sex is the same as yours: discuss beforehand which activities each of you thinks are risk-free enough to do without a barrier, which are risky enough to require a barrier, and which are too risky to do at all. If one of you has more conservative standards than the other, that person sets the standards, regardless of who's topping and who's bottoming – it is entirely unacceptable to subject someone to a physical risk to which they haven't consented. The important thing is not the latest statistics or scientific study; the important thing is that you both *feel* safe.

Take care of your own safety, too: don't play with strangers in private, and the first few times you play with a new partner, tell a trusted friend where you are and who you're with (and make sure your play partner knows that you've taken that precaution).

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS.

Not everything that can go wrong in an S/M scene has anything to do with S/M. As part of taking care of your bottom's (and your own) physical safety, you should have the equipment, training and ability to handle real-world emergencies ranging from quakes and fires through heart attacks and seizures.

If you don't know what you'd do if the lights went out, if your bottom suddenly became seriously ill, or if you inadvertently started a fire in the playroom, you shouldn't do the scene until you've figured these things out. .

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR CARING FOR YOUR EQUIPMENT. If you own your own whips, sex toys, bondage equipment and so on, you are responsible for seeing that these items are carefully selected, well maintained and properly cleaned. Aside from the aesthetics of the situation (dirty or uncared-for toys are a sign of a sloppy top), poor quality or poorly maintained toys are downright dangerous. We know one top who broke a

finger trying to grab a whirling handle on a poorly designed winch, and we've heard many stories of bottoms pulling inadequately attached eye-bolts out of the wall and sustaining nasty falls.

While the jury is still out regarding whether or not HIV can be transmitted via uncleaned sex toys, it is certain that various other nasties, including hepatitis C, can be. When you're not sure if a toy has been exposed to body fluids, assume that it's contaminated and clean it carefully. Chapter 10, and several of the books in the Resource Guide, give more detailed toy cleaning information.

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR OWN AND YOUR PARTNER'S EMOTIONAL SAFETY. This may seem a little counterintuitive – after all, in the real world, we believe that people should be responsible for taking care of their own emotions and for asking for the kinds of emotional support they need. But we believe that the implied contracts of what we do are a little different, and that the usual boundaries get shifted a bit when we play together.

If Dossie showed up for our co-authoring appointment tomorrow, and Janet said to her, “Dossie, I feel angry because of something you said last week,” we would handle that in certain ways: Janet would accept responsibility for her own anger and would process it herself – with Dossie's help if Dossie cared to give that help, or without it if Dossie didn't.

But when we agree to play together, there is an assumption that those adult boundaries are going to be altered – perhaps even to some degree dropped. This is what we meant in the Introduction when we said that “BDSM is ritualized codependency.” Unlike the real world, where we assume that adults are responsible for processing their own emotions and taking care of their own needs, an player – particularly a bottom

– may become quite dependent. Part of our responsibility as tops is caring for our bottoms when they are in that childlike, dependent state. If you think about it, this dictum is actually similar to our responsibility to care for our bottoms’ physical well-being when they may be too endorphined out or too deeply in bottom space to do so.

So we believe that whether or not a bottom has asked to have their emotional safety taken care of, our responsibilities are to provide that support. As a default, we think that a top should take the lead in discussing what kinds of stimuli are likely to trigger emotional trauma for a bottom (Was she abused as a child? Is she a victim of violent crime? Is she grieving a lost friend or relationship?), and in ending or altering a scene that seems to be pushing emotional buttons in an unexpected way. If a top and bottom agree to venture into difficult emotional territory, we also think the top thereby takes responsibility to be available to the bottom during any emotional “aftershocks” that ensue. Tops have aftershocks too, so we think this agreement should be mutual.

Even if you’re doing a scene that isn’t particularly emotional, we think tops should expect to provide plenty of support, praise and affection – before, during and particularly after the scene. (If your bottom doesn’t like this kind of nurturance, she should tell you so.) Taking good care of your bottom helps both of you to process the scene and nourishes both of you, so you can go on to do more and better scenes together in the future.

5

HOW DO YOU LEARN TO DO THIS STUFF?

Okay, so you're interested. You have fantasies, you've thought about it, maybe you even have somebody who wants to play with you. So now what? Do you just rear up and snarl "On your knees, bitch" (or "boy," as the case may be)? Well, please don't – until you have a clear idea about what happens next.

How do you learn to do all this complex, sexy, arcane, and potentially dangerous stuff? How to tie someone up, preferably without damaging their nerves... how to build a structure that keeps your D/S connection hot *and* healthy... how to give someone a flogging without breaking any bones... how to give commands in an obey-me-now tone of voice... how to use an enormous range of implements to inflict all kinds of different and unimaginable sensations, *and* be deft enough not to drop any of them on your own toes, *and* still feel like a top?

For the novice top, there is a lot to learn. Start by giving yourself permission to be ignorant: it is not a crime to not know something. And even though your fantasy top may be omniscient,

you are going to have to get down and learn. The more you can learn, and the more you are willing to learn, the better a top you will be. We feel sure you can have fun while you are learning to do all these wonderful things – *we* sure do.

If you live in or near a city that has a BDSM support group, join it. Support groups regularly put on demonstrations by experienced players of various skills, like flogging or play piercings, where they talk about the safety information and show you what to do. At such groups, you can also meet and ask questions of experienced players, or perhaps join forces with another learner to share experience and support each other in your explorations. You may find a mentor. You may find an experienced bottom who wants to play with you and is willing to show you a few things.

Unfortunately, as the BDSM scene grows, we are seeing more separated populations emerging. Support groups now are often targeted to very specific members: gay men, dykes, heterosexuals (with bisexuals and transgendered folks welcome to some degree in most if not all of them), with even smaller groups for crossdressers, fetishists and the like. While it may be nice to be able to join a support group exclusively composed of people like yourself, we mourn the loss of diversity. When we were coming out, we learned so much from people who were different from ourselves, and we miss the sense of a larger community and the stimulation and adventures we encountered.

Please don't let your top attitude get in the way of learning from your bottom. The bottom knows these sensations and emotions from the inside, and knows more than anyone what works and what doesn't. Also, tastes and limits vary from bottom to bottom, so even when you become experienced you're still going to need to find out what works and doesn't work for each bottom you play with.

If you have friends who are seasoned players, you can try out activities you would like to do to someone else by getting someone to do them to you. A friend of ours learned massage by getting a lot of massages and remembering what she liked: you can learn topping by bottoming, and paying attention to what works, and asking the top questions afterwards if you were too distracted (or happy) to pay attention to the technical details. It's not uncommon for dominants to learn their craft by serving under a more experienced dominant for a prearranged period of time, often six months to a year; this way they can start by learning what submission feels like, move onward to assisting the dominant during play with other submissives, and eventually "graduate" as experienced dominants, ready to take on submissives of their own.

What, you say, me bottom? But I'm a top! (Dossie once had that last sentence printed on a T-shirt as a present for a top of hers.) Some people hold that it is not possible to become a good top without bottoming, without direct personal experience of the sensations you like to inflict on others. We do know good tops who never bottom, but we find them to be the exception rather than the rule. Most good players, both top and bottom, have some history of switching, and many identify as switches.

We've told you already that this book is not an instruction manual, and we have listed several good books to read in the Bibliography that will tell you how to perform various S/M activities safely and well. Be careful when reading books, especially pornography – many books are written by people with little or no experience, for fantasy purposes only, and you can't learn how to do the real part from them.

People all over the world join in conversations on the Internet or on computer bulletin boards, where you can pick up a lot of information and ask questions – but please remember to check things out because you have no way of knowing whether your source has real experience or is just dreaming. Here in San

Francisco there are publicly advertised classes on BDSM techniques and philosophies from basic through very advanced; other cities have similar institutions. More sources of information are listed in the Resource Guide.

DO IT YOURSELF. Another resource for learning about new sensations is yourself. Try things out on yourself and see how they feel. Put a clothespin on the web between your thumb and your forefinger to find out how intense the sensation is, or put it on your chest, or your nipple, or.... If the sensation seems too intense, see if you can eroticize it by masturbating. Does this change how it feels? Are you still reading this book?

Oops! We got carried away. Here we were telling you about trying things out at home. What we *meant* to say is that we want you to practice hitting a pillow with your new whip till you can hit the same spot with all the tails together every time, experiment with bondage ideas to find out if a particular sash, belt or rope will cut off circulation or abrade the skin if you yank on it, kneel on a hard floor for a period of time to see what parts of your body feel strained or uncomfortable... in short, do your homework.

Start any new endeavor by thinking about what you are doing. With a new whip, for instance, think about what parts of the body have enough padding to strike safely – the ass, thighs, shoulder muscles and other well-padded parts with no exposed underlying organs can be struck with most kinds of whips, whereas backs of knees, faces and necks can only be tapped lightly... get the idea? And each person has different sensitivities on different parts of their body. How will you find that out?

A basic rule of starting out doing anything new: you can't go wrong by starting out very lightly and working on up. Dossie remembers:

When I was a real neophyte, at one of the first occasions where I saw experienced people play, I was watching two leathersmen, dressed head to toe in black leather with nickel studs gleaming everywhere, aviator sunglasses – I was completely intimidated. They were the most menacing-looking human beings I had ever been in the same room with. The top had a riding crop, and the bottom bent over a table, and I expected mayhem. What actually happened was that the top took the crop and went tap tap tap as lightly as rain over that bottom's ass. He made the skin flush with the lightest touches, bringing the blood to the skin, very patiently. I watched the bottom slowly become engaged in the sensation, swaying slightly, breathing deeper, getting turned on, all while the crop's touch was very sensual, very light. *Very* gradually, the top began to hit a little harder. As soon as the bottom began to jerk a little at the blows, he held steady and set up a rhythm for a while, not increasing the intensity, just staying right where it was beginning to hurt. I watched the bottom become entranced. Again and again, the top increased the intensity by just one notch, and the bottom became more and more responsive, both of them obviously in perfect communication with each other, almost as if they were dancing. Eventually, the top was striking with all the force he could muster, and the bottom was thrashing and yelling with wild abandon – they stayed there for a while too, savoring the experience as long as possible before it was time to come back down.

It's tough to go wrong by starting light, and some of the best floggings and canings start out as sensual scenes. Some may stay sensual, enjoying the dominance and control and the sensation without a need for intense pain. But however far you are going to go, starting any sensation at the lightest possible level allows the bottom to work his or her way into it as it allows you to get accustomed to the implement, work into a rhythm and get your aim adjusted so that if and when the scene escalates to a more intense level you will have, essentially, practiced.

Same goes for scenes that are more about control than sensation. A scene can go badly awry if the dominant starts right off the bat giving orders that she knows are going to be emotionally very challenging to the submissive. We recommend starting with the easy stuff. Of course, what feels easy is going to vary from one submissive to the next – you need to find out about such things during negotiation – but many dominants start scenes by having the submissive remove her clothes or assume a certain position like kneeling. As the submissive begins to relax and become a little entranced, you can add more challenging forms of control.

Helpful hint number two: take your time. A fantasy top may dash in and tie up his or her victim in three seconds, but that's fantasy. What is actually very sexy is to put someone in restraints very slowly, in a ritual pace, so you can savor the entire process, and have enough time to get the knots right without fumbling. Take your time approaching your bottom's body – just because he is all tied up doesn't mean you should leap on his or her genitals with little glad cries and no foreplay. Spend some time touching skin; it will bring you into synch with your bottom and take him further down into bottom space. And when you do get to the erogenous zones, take a lot of time. Enjoy yourself. After all, your bottom can't stop you, right?

Another hint: get comfortable. If you are going to spend a nice long time doing something exquisite to another person's body, you don't want to have to stop because your back hurts, so be aware of the position you are in when you start up and make sure it's going to be comfortable for a while. Some tops wear weight-lifting belts to protect their backs when they play, others recommend shoulder-stretching exercises before doing a flogging.

And don't forget to make the room comfortable. You might be wearing more clothes than your bottom, and you might also be moving around more, so remember that naked people who can't move get cold, and turn the heat up. Floggers create a wind chill factor, so turn the heat up even further – you don't want your bottom distracted by the wrong kinds of discomfort. Check to make sure lights are not in your or your bottom's eyes (unless you're doing an interrogation scene), and make sure candles are safely placed where you aren't going to knock them over. Have towels, rubber gloves, condoms, lube and whatever toys you may be using laid out where you can reach them without losing contact.

A final suggestion: when it starts getting good, when you start getting response, when your bottom starts breathing hard or maybe writhing a little, that means that you are doing something very right and you should keep on doing it. Many people make the mistake of speeding up at this point, or hitting harder, or otherwise upping the intensity, which can immediately take the bottom beyond the place where she was having such a good time. You'll develop a feel for when it's time to turn the volume up another notch – and stay with *that* another while – and this is how you can get to spend a very long time having lots of fun while you work your way to Nirvana.

And if you only get partway to heaven this time, please remember that there is always the future. You can choose to worry about what didn't happen in a scene, and if you wish, you can

feel like a failure if the scene you play today doesn't get as far as you wanted it to. But those two leathermen we described earlier had almost certainly played before and not gotten anywhere near that far. So value the pleasure you had today, and have confidence that you have also gained knowledge and expertise that will take you further down the road the next time you play.

As you can see, there is a lot to learn, but be reassured that most of the details will become second nature to you very quickly. The examples listed here are not a complete list, but a few ideas to get you started. And once you get started, we hope you will have a very good time learning new and wonderful ways to play for the rest of your life.

interlude 2

A scene at a party, played by our friend Bill and a stranger.

We don't say a word. We've never met before. We're just two horny guys at a sex party. He wanders into an empty room, giving me that "Come hither" look recognized by queer men everywhere. In the room, he is seated on the couch, legs spread, touching himself through the one-piece latex suit covering his trunk. It has short sleeves and legs.

This is a rubber fetish party, my first. I feel a bit inadequate in my standard-issue leather vest and Levi's. I lower my face to his. My intuition is working tonight. I correctly guess that he likes being nibbled on the neck – prefers it to sloppy, wet kisses. He writhes beneath me. I press one hand firmly into his pectorals, pinning him as I nip into him more intensely, lips covering teeth. His breathing deepens. My fingers massage the hot latex suit. There's a zipper down the front. I pull it down to the spot between his broad pecs, exposing a splay of scattered brown hairs. He looks up at me – large brown eyes. I kiss him dryly on the mouth. We begin dry-kissing. Our breath is hot.

I reach inside the zipper, kneading and pinching his exposed pectoral flesh. It feels like I'm invading him, molesting him. This makes my dick jump. I notice through his jumpsuit that I'm having the same effect on his. I slide my knee up to his balls and press as I pinch his nipples through the latex. I start slapping his inner thighs. They're also warm from the latex, and it feels so good.

I remove my vest and pull the front of my black T-shirt over my neck, exposing my chest. I place his hands over my largish nipples, and we begin tugging each other's nipples, his still covered in latex. I begin slapping them with my hands. It feels so satisfying to slap this boy through his hot, tight rubber skin. I take my dick out, fully hard now, and slap it against his thighs, which makes it even harder – it almost hurts.

I pull a small bottle of lube out of a pocket and squeeze some onto my dick. I jack it off in front of him, slapping it against my outstretched palm. I open up a rubber and squeeze some lube into it, wiping off my sticky hand and rolling the affair down my swollen shaft. I put it up to his lips, and he hungrily gobbles it down. My knee slides to his groin again, and I stroke his fine brown hair. Usually I don't much like condoms for sucking dick, but in this scene, it's become one more piece of latex to fetishize. I pull out another one and try to place it around my nuts. This provides us with some comic relief as I, then he, try to trap the stubborn balls unsuccessfully. Finally I shrug and we laugh a bit.

He looks so fucking hot in that fucking suit that I start squeezing him all over as if he's the last guy I'll ever get to touch and I'm trying to carve the experience into the deepest corner of my brain. I want to rip him out of his kinky rubber armor, and yet I want to keep him trapped inside it forever, all tantalizingly displayed and hot to the touch.

I squeeze his well-developed biceps and broad, fleshy shoulders; run my fingers through his beautiful hair; squeeze his pointy nipples and his love-handles, and finally his hot, hard dick. I begin slapping it with the backs of my fingers, gently at first, worried that I'll slap too hard and take him out of the scene. But he obviously likes it, so I slap harder and harder, squeezing his ample balls. I hold his balls and gaze intently into his eyes. His nostrils flare.

Out of nowhere come the backs of my fingers, slapping him lightly across one cheek. The eyes widen. I kiss him dryly on the mouth. Then again. Slap. Kiss. Slap. Kiss. I feel surges of blood through his clenched balls. "Take it out," I hiss. It's the first time either of us has spoken in ten minutes of

anonymous sex. He scrambles to comply, sitting up and beginning to unzip. "Slowly," I say. "Turn me on."

I grab my rubberized dick and jack off, pinching my nipples, both of us now showing off for each other. He slides his fingers down his stomach slowly, pulling the zipper to its end. He gingerly pries his moist cockflesh loose from the clutching rubber sheath, then the balls. He raises his eyebrows, gesturing toward my lube. I hold up the bottle and squeeze some onto his fingers. He works it onto his expanding dick. I draw closer and slip my hands under the open suit and really work his nipples now. His dick gets enormous – this kid has a dick that I can't get both my hands to cover.

I hand him a condom. He takes it out and I squirt a bit of the lube into it. He rolls it down his sticky dick, where it barely reaches bottom. Then I kneel between his knees and take it in my mouth, biting the head between my teeth and tickling his balls. He's working my nipples just the way I like, and soon the whole hot tube is throbbing down my throat and I'm biting him on just the other side of the condom, near his nuts. I can tell he's amazed, like not too many guys can do this to him. And I'm certainly not one of those tops who thinks that cocksucking is the station of the bottom. Quite the contrary – I use my dominant, forceful attitude to get boys like this one all hot and bothered, and *then* show them what a champion dick-chomper I am once their dicks are really stiff.

So I milk this groaning boy for maybe three minutes with my well-trained throat muscles, and then I begin jacking him off with both hands. He wants some lube, so I give him the bottle again, and he starts jacking off my condom-clad cock with his sticky hand. I grab his dick near its base and start slapping it into my palm. I feel a new tension building in his thighs, and as I slap and jerk his dick, I mutter, "Yeah, fucker. That dick's gonna shoot. Gonna fill up this rubber with hot cream. Gonna dump your fat load into this tube. Gonna slap it around till you fuckin' come, rubberboy. Gonna tickle your fat balls till you squirt –" And then he's *doing* it, twisting and gasping, that big boner of his making that little nipple on the condom tip *very* full indeed. I tickle him under the ridge until he can't take any more. I stand, stretching my

cramped legs, figuring that will be all, but he reaches out and grasps my still-hard dick, jacking me off.

Now normally, I could never get off by being jacked, much less through a condom, but I'm so turned on that in two minutes I'm bellowing and spurting my load into that rubber, amazed, my entire body trembling. We catch our breath, staring at each other and grinning like idiots.

Soon we will get up from this couch, shed our jizz-filled condoms, wash up and quickly become separated by increasing numbers of people, miles, hours, days – but right now we're just two blissed-out guys, happy to be in this room together, no longer horny.

6

SOARING HIGHER

“All the things you can talk about in anyone’s work are the things that are least important.... You can describe all the externals of a performance – everything, in fact, but what really constitutes its core. Explaining something makes it go away, so to speak; what’s important is what’s left over after you’ve explained everything else.” – Edward Gorey

If you’ve been topping long enough – and if you’re very fortunate – you’ll sooner or later have a scene in which you and your bottom seem in perfect synch, sharing an experience that feels like your hearts are wide open and blending their heat to create a white-hot conflagration of intensity, intimacy and transcendence.

And if you’re like us, the first thing you’re going to think after the scene is over and you and your bottom are collapsed together in a panting sweating sated heap is “Oh my god, that was phenomenal, how can I get more of that?!”

Well, we can't promise to teach you the magic trick that will turn all your scenes into life-altering, soul-merging epiphanies. But both of us – lucky us! – have had enough such scenes, both as tops and as bottoms, that we feel able to share with you some of the factors and concepts that can help lead you in this direction.

GETTING TECHNIQUE OUT OF THE WAY. When you first learned to drive, you had to think about every move before you made it. You had to remember consciously to check your mirrors, work the clutch and the stick, set the handbrake and do a million other little tasks – it made your head spin. But now that you're an experienced driver, you do all those things without consciously thinking about them – it's not that you're driving less well, it's that the "driving" part of your mind has gotten so much into its groove that it's moved into a part of your brain where it doesn't need constant attention.

Technique in BDSM – how to swing a flogger, where to place the knots, how to phrase a command to sound firm instead of whiny or harsh – is a bit like that. When you first start topping, you'll often feel like there are a million things to remember at once (and you'll be right: there are). The need to concentrate on all the myriad things you've learned about technique and safety, plus the limits and desires you've negotiated with this particular bottom, will fill your head so completely that there won't be room for too much else.

But as you grow more experienced, the details of technique become like the details of driving: you still know how to do them, and you're doing them well, but they're not occupying much of your conscious mind. It's at this point that you may find yourself able to open up to the less intellectual, more visceral joys of BDSM... and you may find yourself having experiences of "just knowing" what to do next, or being able to anticipate your bottom's desire or fantasy without being told, or automatically falling into the exact rhythm and force needed to send you and your bottom both to heaven.

So let's say you're experienced enough that you don't have to spend a lot of your conscious effort fussing with technique. What are some of the ways that you can use to rocket yourself and your partner(s) to another planet?

STAYING OPEN. This is the biggest and most important tip we can give you. A lot of tops have the idea that their job is to remain cool, withdrawn and withholding, to share no emotion and to show no turn-on. If this is your topping style, go for it – many folks prefer this kind of scene, in which the top is the heartless administrator of control or sensation and the bottom's job is simply to receive.

But we've found that the experiences we've been describing here are fundamentally *collaborative* – which requires that the top *and* the bottom remain emotionally as open as possible. A contradiction in terms? No, not really.

As you top, pay attention to what's happening in your own body and heart. Do you feel savage and merciless? Giggly and playful? Wildly turned on? Deeply moved? Do you feel like grunting or laughing or crying or coming? None of these feelings or actions are “inappropriate” for a top; we've both felt them many times, separately and in combination. And when we share those feelings with our bottoms, when we let them know how happy or fierce or turned-on they make us feel, our bottoms can join with us, and our feelings can synergistically multiply to a crescendo of sensation and emotion.

And when we stay open to what's going on inside us, we can also stay open to what's going on *outside* us – in the environment around us, within the boundaries of the scene, and in the hearts, minds and bodies of our bottoms.

PAYING ATTENTION. Even the most stoical of bottoms sends a constant stream of cues – signals that let you know whether she's floating along happily or struggling to keep up, eagerly awaiting her next command or on the verge of rebellion, wanting more or white-

knuckling it to tolerate what she's already receiving, wishing you'd hit her *here* instead of *there*.

Here's a list of the cues we like to look for to tell us what we need to know about our bottoms' state of mind:

- ***Muscle tension.*** Someone who's having a good time is generally relaxed and loose; someone who's struggling is probably tense and stiff. Watch your bottom's muscles, especially those in the places where people tend to store tension – neck, shoulders, belly. Is his face relaxed and serene, or squinched up in a grimace? Are his hands clenched into fists? If you see muscles that are tight, quivering or bulging, your bottom is probably struggling to keep up with you and may have to safeword if you push too much harder without a break.

One big caveat: Impending orgasm often looks a lot like intense pain, and if you don't know this particular bottom well, it can be hard to tell the difference. You could try just asking, but that might spoil the moment. Or you could try a bit of sexual touching – if that's part of your agreements – and see what kind of response you get.

- ***Breathing.*** Relaxed people breathe deeply and slowly, from their diaphragms. If they're making noise, the sounds tend to be deep moans or growls. Tense people breathe tightly and rapidly, high up in their chests, and their sounds are often high-pitched screams or whimpers. If you've ever hurt yourself, you know how you breathed during the pain – you probably were using a lot of short little high breaths. But this kind of breathing is not what you want for your bottom; a bottom who's breathing like that will hyperventilate (getting too little oxygen

and throwing off too little carbon dioxide) and might panic.

So, how do you get your bottom's breathing slowed down so that she can relax? Some tops like to simply use the word "breathe" to remind their bottoms to take it easy, but we find that using words in the heat of play can distract a bottom from the wonderfulness of what you're doing to her. A trick we like is to establish contact with your bottom – eye contact and/or physical contact: Janet likes to place the palm of her hand firmly and gently on her bottom's chest or the center of her back. Then simply breathe in the rhythm you want your bottom to breathe, perhaps a little noisily or emphatically. Most bottoms will instinctively begin to breathe with you. Since breathing in synch, especially during eye contact, is often taught as a tantric exercise to achieve greater union, this strategy may also bring you closer to the heights you're trying to achieve.

Bottoms also reveal a lot with the sounds they make. Happy bottoms hum, babble, giggle, growl, purr, moan, and "sing" – a beautiful smooth multitoned melody that goes up and down as the sensation rises and falls. Bottoms who are nearing their limits scream, shriek or sometimes snarl or curse. An experienced bottom may be able to tell you ahead of time which sounds mean what.

- ***Posture and movement.*** Watch your bottom's body. For example, if he's leaning or arching into the sensations you're giving, that's a reliable sign that he's with you and ready for more. If he's flinching or drawing away from the sensation, it might be time to back off a bit – and

then later, when he's more relaxed, you can take the play up another notch if that feels right.

Bottoms who are beginning to become entranced may show it with rhythmic movements of their bodies. They may “dance,” shifting back and forth from one foot to another or even bouncing up and down. Their hips may undulate back and forth, or from side to side. Their heads may nod or shake. They may also throw off excess energy by shaking their hands as though they were shaking water off the ends of their fingers, grabbing the bondage and yanking or rattling it, or stamping their feet.

If your scene is about control rather than sensation, watch for posture. A submissive who is proudly and happily under your command will show it with a proud carriage and springy step. An entranced submissive may move slowly and dreamily, but purposefully. A reluctant or unhappy bottom is likelier to slump and trudge. While we can't tell you what to do about those situations, it's always best to know your submissive's state of mind so you can act accordingly.

These are just a few of the ways that you can observe what's going on with your bottom so that the two of you can fly higher and farther. But what of the perceptions you may sometimes experience that *aren't* observable – that you somehow “just know”?

INTUITION AND WHERE TO FIND IT

The best definition of “intuition” we've heard is “the ability to know something without knowing how you know it.”¹ You may have experienced intuitions in your day-to-day life – a sense that

1 *Intuition Workout: A Practical Guide to Discovering and Developing Your Inner Knowing*, by Nancy Rosanoff. Aslan Publications, 1991.

someone you just met isn't what they seem, or that you shouldn't turn around that streetcorner, or that something wonderful is about to happen to you.

Many people feel that intuition is simply your subconscious mind gathering clues that your conscious mind is too busy to grasp. Others think it's a genuine paranormal phenomenon. We don't really know, or, for that matter, care – as long as it works for us, both outside our scenes and in them.

We can't teach you how to get intuition – you already have it, to at least some degree. What we *can* do is teach you how to find it within yourself and use it to read your bottom's physical and emotional states for bigger, hotter scenes.

Intuition, of course, has its limits – even the professional psychics who find lost children for police departments are the first to tell you that they're right less than half the time, and much less often when the intuition involves someone close to them. So while we love and encourage intuition, we want to emphasize that while you're in scene space, it's very easy to get your intuitions mixed up with your own desires and fears. Serious mistakes can get made this way: it's not a good idea to follow your intuition to grab that cattle prod and press the button with no previous negotiation.

But when it works, it can *really* work – as we discovered together recently:

You know how in your fantasy certain things happen in a certain order, almost like a ritual, very specific and detailed? Some of us embroider the same fantasy over long periods of time, creating a rich tapestry night after night, our personal and very private bedtime story.

We played a scene together recently that was a true mindblower. Now your authors have been playing with each other for ten years, and certainly each knows a lot about what the other one likes. But this time, with Janet topping Dossie, Janet managed to do Dossie's

fantasy (which Dossie had never told her), item by item, in order, down to the smallest detail.

Dossie says, “It took me a while to realize what was going on – at first, it just plain felt good, and entrancing, and very right. Like somebody humming an old song you’ve loved for a really long time. We were well into the scene before I got it that something amazing was going on. I didn’t say anything – not on purpose, more because I was so absorbed in the play that it would have been ridiculous to interrupt. And who would want to anyhow?”

Janet says, “I was startled and a little bit freaked afterwards when Dossie told me what had been going on. I had no sense of the scene being anything special. In hindsight, I could see that some of the things I’d done weren’t in my usual repertoire, but at the time they just felt like inspirations – like I was simply putting *this* toy in *that* orifice, and tying *that* body part in *this* position, the way I always do. It was wonderful, of course, but playing with Dossie just about always is... and it didn’t seem any different than that.”

The scene was fabulous and emotionally profound, but, curiously, not more fabulous than other scenes we have played. And, notes Dossie, the feeling was different: in the fantasy, the culminating moments are tremendously romantic. But we’ve never had a romantic relationship, rather a solid and loving friendship... and that didn’t change. Maybe that was the biggest surprise, to play a scene that was perfectly psychic and still feel like the same two people afterward.

So what do you do when you feel a sense of what to do next but aren’t sure? One possibility is simply to ask, either in words (you

may need to step out of scene space to do this if your scene has a strong D/S element) or by holding up a proposed implement for the bottom to see and agree to. Another, probably more useful, is to try just a little of whatever your intuition is telling you, then use the observational skills you've already learned to see how your bottom reacts.

So, now that we've given you all these warnings and cautions about intuition, how do you discover yours? To answer that question, we'd like to refer to a concept that the Buddhists call "expert mind." Expert mind is the part of you that stores facts, makes decisions, thinks about what happened in the past and projects what may happen in the future. Without expert mind, you couldn't function in the world at all and you certainly couldn't be a top – you're using your expert mind to read this book, for example.

But when you're seeking intuition, you have to move expert mind to the back of your consciousness, letting it guide your actions in the same way that it guides you when you drive a car. Expert mind is the enemy of intuition – it tells you things like "you're wrong," "you know better than this," "nobody else does it that way" and our personal favorite, "*real* tops don't do it this way." What the Buddhists recommend for finding your intuitive wisdom is "beginner's mind," in which you approach everything as though you were doing it for the first time.

So: try to focus on the moment. Trust that expert mind will be there to guide you through the technique parts, and open yourself up to your perceptions of what's going on *right now, right here*. You may have to stop for a second and adjust your focus. Take in your own body, your bottom's body, the room, the sounds, the smells, the light – everything in and around you right now. If you know any guided relaxation techniques, use them (and if you don't, allow us to recommend a good yoga class). If you simply open yourself up (remember, we talked about this earlier) and perceive what's going

on, you may start to receive messages. Beginners are always learning something new.

For some people – Janet is one – the messages come as lights and colors. “I see a kind of ‘glow’ from a certain part of my bottom’s body, or from a particular toy,” she notes. Others may feel a part of their own body twitching to move in a certain way, or may hear a hum, click or other sound coming from the place, action or toy that needs their attention. Some actually hear a voice, their own or someone else’s, telling them what needs to happen next. Or maybe it’s just an urge to do *something* – to give a certain order, to place the bottom in a certain position, to say a certain sentence. When you get such a message, proceed slowly and gradually, as we told you earlier. If your bottom’s response is enthusiastic – congratulations, go for it!

If you get nothing, don’t worry about it; you can always try again later. Although the process of seeking intuition sounds clunky and awkward as we describe it here, with practice it gets faster, smoother and more effective.

To many readers, much of this chapter will sound too New Age for words (one of Janet’s regular partners, a highly intuitive body worker and martial artist, says indignantly, “I don’t do woo-woo shit”). But in our experience, the best tops pretty much universally use these concepts and techniques, whether they do so consciously or not. We encourage you to at least give these ideas a try and see what can happen to your scenes – they’ve certainly created some amazing play for us!

7

BDSM ETHICS

When we play, we give ourselves and each other permission and encouragement to explore the further reaches of our psyches and to adventure bravely down the path of the forbidden. We open ourselves up to the unknown on the dark side. And when we are open, we are terribly vulnerable.

So, in order to be open, and to be safe and healthy while we play at violation and betrayal, we believe that all players should enter into scene space with the highest of ethics, and a firm commitment to respect and honor the courage and the vulnerability that we all, tops and bottoms, bring with us into a scene. We see a scene as a special and sacred space: it is critical that we respect the trust and integrity of each individual in it.

CONSENT

Full consent in *S/M*, or in any other manifestation of sexuality, requires an active collaboration for the pleasure and well-being of all persons involved. We come into our play with

the intention of actively supporting each other in exploring sensation, danger and vulnerability.

Consent to any scene is very specific: we consent, tops and bottoms both, to every detail, and we can choose not to consent to any item on a scene agenda.

Honesty in consent is mandatory for both tops and bottoms. You can easily understand what can happen if an eager-to-please bottom consents to some violent assault that they really don't want, and you go ahead and they hate it. Your safety and competence as a top are violated, and you are faced with a freaked-out or angry bottom through no fault of your own. As a top, if you consent to play a scene that you really don't feel good about, and you don't share your reservations, and you don't somehow magically get into it after you begin, then you can wind up playing an awkward and "cold" scene, with little or no connection to your bottom, who can wind up feeling abandoned, abused and violated.

Consent is only meaningful if it can be withdrawn without risking undue criticism, judgment or rejection. If a bottom or top tries something in a scene and it is genuinely unpleasant to them, they have an absolute right to interrupt a scene, renegotiate the agenda, and to have their concerns heard without blame. Respect for consent is mandatory.

RESPECTING LIMITS

Respect and honor your bottom's limits. Respect and honor your own limits. Respect means nobody gets put down or belittled, top or bottom, for whatever limits they may have. Looking for loopholes in a bottom's stated limits is cheating, as is concealing your own agenda with half-truths or omissions. "Well, you didn't *say* I couldn't shave your head" is not a substitute for consent. Ethical players negotiate scenes in good faith.

CONFIDENTIALITY. In recent years, due to the energetic work of members of our community, kink has become less stigmatized, and some of us may not feel as great a need to keep our sex lives in the closet as others. This is wonderful progress, and we look forward to the day when none of us needs to walk through the world fearing oppression if our secrets were known. However, that time is not yet here, and many of us could be at tremendous risk if the wrong people – our landlords, employers, students, parents, children – were to find out about our interest in BDSM.

So we still need to keep information about others that we acquire at support groups and play parties confidential. Do not assume that just because you are totally uncloseted, everyone else should be. Do not assume that because a player is well-known in the community that the person has no closets – we know players who use assumed names because outing might jeopardize important parts of their lives like joint custody of their children. Do not assume that you know what another person's requirements for discretion are, or that another person lives his life as openly as you do – just protect everybody's privacy.

Are there exceptions to confidentiality? Yes. We can look to the legal and ethical standards of medical and therapeutic confidentiality for guidelines: it is acceptable, and at times even required, to violate confidentiality when there is significant danger of harm to any person. If a person assaults you, you don't keep it a secret, you call the police. Gossip may sometimes have an unpleasant but necessary function within the community to warn others of players who in your experience are in some way dangerous. (It is not ethical, however, to badmouth a player simply because you don't like them or are angry with them.) We try to balance negative gossip with "goodmouthing": making a point of introducing people to each other with full regard for their

prowess, and letting others in the community know when a player does something wonderful.

BOUNDARIES AND BLAMING

Any problem in ethics, including the complex dilemmas we may run into when we pretend to be unethical, can be clarified by looking at it from the point of view of boundaries. *Personal* boundaries are found wherever we understand that I end and you begin. Within the boundary of scene space, our personal boundaries will probably be very different than they are in the outside world... so when I know which boundaries are in effect right now, I know when it's the right time to violate you.

People also have *internal* boundaries that tell us what state of consciousness we are in. For those of us who play a number of roles – top, bottom, Doctor Mean, Dracula, little boy, baby girl – we open and change our internal boundaries to get in and out of role, often unconsciously. The more conscious we can be about this, the safer we will be, and the more adept at getting into (and back out of) the role we want to play right now.

Internal boundaries tell us the difference between a thought, a wish, a fantasy and a dream. For the S/M player, the boundary between fantasy and reality is all-important: it is how we maintain our sanity, and how we maintain our identities as big bad mean ethical loving sadists.

Blaming, a special case of bad boundaries, consists of refusing to own and take the responsibility for our own stuff, our feelings, dilemmas, and actions. Of course, occasions in which a problem is truly one person's fault do happen, and need to be respected... but we believe most problems that crop up between people actually belong to both or all of them. When we blame, we fail to shoulder our part of the burden; we project the responsibility for whatever is wrong onto another, usually to

protect ourselves from feeling terribly guilty or anxious. When we blame, we also disempower ourselves – if it's all *your* fault, then *I* must be impotent.

So we recommend that you approach conflict that arises from play (or any other relationship, for that matter) in a nonjudgmental mode. In our culture, you can observe many people attempting to resolve a problem by discovering whose fault it is (the comic author Fran Lebowitz says “It isn’t whether you win or lose, it’s where you lay the blame”), as if most of our dilemmas were caused by somebody doing something wrong. In S/M, we can make tops wrong by accusing them of anger, attitude or abuse when a scene doesn’t work out well. We can make bottoms wrong by accusing them of being needy, resistant or smart-ass.

Blaming may alleviate our anxiety on a short-term basis, but in the long run resolves nothing. If, on the other hand, you can put your judgments aside and operate on your own feelings while you listen to your partner’s feelings, you may be able to come to an understanding that keeps you in sympathy with each other *and* empowers you to take care of the problem so you can continue playing and having a good time.

HEARING FEEDBACK. Good post-scene etiquette is for the top to call the bottom within a few days of a scene to check in and make sure everything’s okay, and bottoms will respect you and feel well cared for when you do. Mostly you will hear flattering feedback that can be a big help if you’re feeling a bit uncertain, guilty or low. This is also an occasion to ask the bottom if there was anything in that scene that she would change, or do differently in the future. This is how you make space for your bottom to tell you about that little bruise in the wrong place, or something that was sharp or harsh or otherwise not optimal for them. Our experience is that bottoms often tell us what we could have done

harder or longer or louder or stronger. Greed is a wonderful thing in a pig slut bottom.

Sometimes you will hear from a bottom who is unhappy or distressed about part of the scene, or some of the things you did. When this happens, it is important, and difficult, that you not get lost in your ego. That ego may be screaming “But you writhed and squealed, I was sure you liked it, I felt like God Almighty, whaddaya mean you didn’t like it!” And you need to put your ego aside and listen.

If your bottom is a good communicator, with any luck she will offer negative feedback without a lot of blaming, in a supportive and nonjudgmental manner. But everybody is not well-versed in communication skills, and when something goes wrong in a scene bottoms are often genuinely frightened or even a little freaked – so you may wind up with complaints coming at you like arrows, from a person who is seriously upset with you.

We do play with scary imagery, and it sometimes happens that a bottom is so frightened by a scene that she feels unable to communicate directly with the top – so you may find out through a third party, or, worse yet, a public accusation. Most of us have a hard time not getting defensive when someone is angry with us, and we may be justified in that we can blame the bottom for blaming us, or for failing to talk to us directly, or for gossiping. And even when you are right, defensiveness and counterattack will still only make the problem worse.

We feel the best thing for you to do in this situation is to listen to the bottom who is upset with you, and hear her out thoroughly whether you agree or not. Be aware that this is happening because the bottom feels bad – hurt or scared or whatever. By being willing to listen to that person’s feelings, you validate them – and that might solve the problem right there.

If you feel you did something wrong, the best thing to do is own it. Remember that apologizing won’t make you less of a

top. And if you don't feel you were wrong, you can still say you're sorry that someone feels bad, or that something you did left them feeling bad. Apologizing won't make you wrong either: you *are* sorry that they feel bad.

Most often these conflicts arise from misunderstandings rather than malice. When you listen, and when you express your regrets about a play partner's unpleasant experience, then that person may become willing to listen to you, and the two of you are in a good position to clear up misunderstandings, and stay friends.

RESPECTING PERSONS

Tops and bottoms both have identities beyond the roles they play in scene. We understand that tops and bottoms are both complete human beings of equal stature and importance, deserving of respect. Their needs are equally important, their wisdom is to be regarded, their opinions worth hearing. When bottoms play at being degraded, do they truly become less than their tops? We think not.

BDSM works best when bottoms honor and value the gift the tops bring to them, with respect for the hard work and personal vulnerability that is involved. And it works best when tops honor and value the gift the bottom brings: the bottom power that fuels the trust and belief which transform us into tops.

8

ON YOUR MARK... GET SET...

COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR TOPS. To get ready to do a scene, you first need to share some information with your bottom, negotiating the specific details of what you are and are not going to do. Ideally, when you're done, you will know what your bottom's limits are and your bottom will know what your limits are. You will have also exchanged some information about what turns each of you on and some ideas about what you both might like to try – knowledge gleaned from fantasies or scenes you have played in the past. You should each have a clear idea of each other's needs – those parts of play that are so essential to you that without them the scene would not be worth doing. Everybody's needs are valid, everybody's needs are important. Including yours.

During a good negotiation, you will also share some wants – things that you and the bottom know that you like or would like to try. Think of the wants as the ingredients from which you will construct a fabulous dinner: how much easier it is to cook when you have lots of ingredients to choose from! Obviously, you'll want to

collect all the wants you can get from both of you. But that's not always easy to do.

GETTING THE INFORMATION YOU NEED. When a bottom tells a top what she likes, it can feel like ordering the top around, which doesn't fit with many players' fantasy roles. Furthermore, many bottoms are embarrassed by their fantasies, and plagued with the belief that whatever it is that they want, it must be too much to ask for. A professional dominatrix of our acquaintance once got so frustrated with a client who would say only "I only want to please you, Mistress," that she told him facetiously, "Then give me the money and leave; I'll go to a movie."

So how do you get that information without getting out the rubber hose (yet)? There are many ways to support a bottom in expressing his or her desires. Just knowing that you *want* this information gives your bottom permission to share it. Sometimes it is easier to deal with this information outside scene space, so many tops instruct their bottoms to write a letter expressing their desires and stating limits. In person, but not in scene space, sharing fantasies and ideas can be fun once you both get into it; you can always start by sharing some interest of your own and then inviting your bottom to contribute.

In scene space, you can order your bottom to communicate and make it part of the play. So your bottom is embarrassed? Goody. You can tie him up and wait until he speaks – and you can wait a long time, if that's what it takes. You can offer positive feedback: "That's hot, I like that, what a good idea, mmmmmm nasty!"

If you and your bottom are in an ongoing D/S relationship, you may need to make special arrangements so that you both can feel free to discuss your desires and fantasies outside your usual roles. E-mail or other written communications might work for this. Or you can establish a special code word to mean "I want to talk to you person-to-person for a while." Or pick a set time every week for

such discussions. Whatever fits for you will probably work, but we think it's a good idea to make some kind of arrangement in order to support both dominants and submissives in being able to freely and honestly express their wants.

Bottoms generally like it when tops say what they want: "I want your ass right now, I want to bend you over that table, I really want to see you on your knees in front of me, what a sweet sight."

If this is your first time with this partner, do remember to inquire about limits, pain tolerance, safer sex, physical limits like asthma, history of abuse or trauma, contact lenses, muscle and joint problems that might make some positions uncomfortable. Experienced bottoms should know enough to tell you their limits without prompting, but not all bottoms know enough to figure out all their limits without ever having tested them. Regardless of your bottom's experience level, if you ask it makes it easier – the bottom doesn't feel so much like she is sitting there with a long list of "don't do this and don't do that," in danger of falling into terminal negativity.

I-MESSAGES. We have talked before about the damage done to hot play by blaming. Here we would like to introduce an alternative borrowed from the couples-counseling literature: the I-message. Communications experts note that we often speak in you-messages, like "You are making me angry, you should be different, you always give me a hard time when I want to have fun, you never want to do what I want." The you-message almost always sounds like an accusation or an attack, and the person to whom it is addressed most commonly becomes defensive and tries to explain themselves and why they are not wrong. When they do that they have stopped listening to you.

The I-message basically means I share something of my internal reality, my feelings, my desires, my thoughts, my beliefs, like: "I feel angry, I would like something to change, I want to

have fun, I want to find some things that we both want to do.” The I-message is clearly about our own stuff, and once we make it clear that we can be responsible for our stuff and willing to take the risk of sharing it, our partners become free to own their own feelings and problems and desires, and to speak their own truth, from their own tender places near the heart. And we are fond of exposed tender places, aren’t we?

NEEDY BOTTOMS. Sometimes our roles get in the way of good communication. As tops, we have permission in scene space to be mean, nasty, intrusive and overpowering; similarly, bottoms may go into their own emotional spaces and become childish, dependent, needy and clinging. In real life we often respond to neediness by closing our boundaries and pushing people away, perhaps becoming annoyed and judgmental in the process. In BDSM, while ideally we both get to open our boundaries in a sort of controlled codependence that would not be acceptable in real life, the urge to withdraw in response to neediness can still be strong.

So how do you find a more constructive way to deal with neediness in scene space? First, you get to have limits. So as a top, if you really hate a particular kind of play that makes your partner seem uncomfortably needy, you can choose not to play that kind of scene.

If you feel pressured by indirect hints, you can insist that the bottom ask directly for what she wants. This can actually be healing: a person who uses neediness and manipulation may have grown up in a family where there was no straightforward way to get his or her needs met (she learned this behavior somewhere, right?), so getting positive strokes for asking for what she wants can be a wonderful revelation.

Or you can negotiate a scene that includes neediness or dependency by making an agreement that the bottom will bring in the independent self when asked: “I want to talk with the grown-up now.” It may take a few moments for the bottom to switch states of

consciousness, but the ability to switch from roles to reality is worth developing – practice makes perfect.

BLACK HOLES. “Black hole” is a terribly rude name for bottoms who do not put out enough visible response for you to feel confident that you have any idea what is going on with them. They may or may not be having a good time, but their demeanor is so impassive that you can’t tell. And if you can’t tell what does or does not work for this bottom, without feedback, how can you know when it is safe to proceed? Response is the top’s safety information, and it is also the top’s reward. This is our theater, and the bottom’s response is our applause.

It’s tempting to deal with unresponsive bottoms by judging – this person is a lousy bottom, and I won’t play with him or her again. But what if you like this bottom? What if he is your friend? Your lover?

Is there anything you can do to make this bottom responsive? Remember that nobody is born knowing how to do this stuff, and anybody can learn. In *The New Bottoming Book*, we discussed the process of getting a scene off the ground and of finding your turn-on as a bottom, and we recommended acting “as if.” If a bottom breathes hard and works his body, he will actually get more turned on, and provide feedback for you to play against. It doesn’t hurt for the top to model turn-on and interest too – think of all that wonderful gay male porn where the top is always saying “Ooooooh, yeah!” in throaty tones. You can breathe hard and grind your groin against your bottom, for example, to get you both turned on and set a good example. Snarl a little.

And you can always ask for the response you want. Janet says that her bottoms tend to respond with enthusiasm when she leans in close and purrs in their ear, “You know, it would really turn me on to hear you scream...”

Back when you were negotiating what you were going to do in this scene, perhaps you remembered to ask some questions about how this bottom gets turned on. Suck on the neck? Blow in the ear? Spit in the face? It's always reassuring when you know what to do.

You can tell a bottom, even without leaving role, that you need more response, that you can't tell if the scene is working or not. Dossie remembers:

The first time I topped at a party I was flogging a woman I didn't know very well, and wasn't sure if it was okay to hit harder. I didn't want to interrupt the scene to ask, especially because there were people watching, and then I got a great idea. In my best mean voice I growled, "If you want me to hit you harder you better get that ass up there where I can get at it!" And she did, and I did, and it was great.

So this bottom knew how to get what she wanted – and, for that matter, that she could reduce the intensity by pulling away. Thus you can instruct your bottom in exactly what kind of body language you want to hear.

ACTIVITIES THAT REQUIRE SPECIAL CONSENT

Disagreements and hard feelings sometimes arise between players when one player takes for granted that it is okay to do something that the other player assumes should not be done without ascertaining consent prior to the scene. This happens in the vanilla world too: a good example might be anal penetration, for which an unspoken etiquette dictates that you find out how your partner feels about his or her asshole before you plunge in and yell "Surprise!"

BDSM opens up the potential for an enormous range of activity, and what is bread-and-butter ordinary for one player might be something the other person has never heard of. A difference of opinion in this area may get discovered in an atmosphere of extreme

adrenaline rush, which can make it difficult to maintain emotional equilibrium. So allow a moment to come down, and please remember that these are not occasions for fault and blame, but for understanding differences in customs and desires.

We will present here a list of things that some people might think would require specific consent – with the proviso that just about nobody would agree with every single item on our list. Still, we think that if you're not certain about consent, you have to ask.

- **Sex.** Some people take for granted that a scene will include something resembling genital sex or orgasm-producing activity, and will be very disappointed if they play with someone who does not have that as a given. Others see their play as something distinct from sex. So you have to ask.

Even if you and your partner have agreed to be sexual, you need to agree on what kinds of sexual behaviors are OK – assplay, as we mentioned earlier, is one common limit. People also make assumptions about safer sex that are better to negotiate: for instance, there is wide difference of opinion about the relative safety of oral sex, and a lot of disagreement in some heterosexual and lesbian communities about whether safer sex is important at all. (Just in case you couldn't guess, we think it is.)

- **Marks.** Temporary marks, like bruises or welts that last a few days, are common occurrences in S/M. However, some people – such as those with vanilla partners at home – might have problems with them, so it's probably a good idea to ask about marks before you haul out the cast-iron cane. (A gynecologist once asked Dossie if she got those bruises riding a horse – Dossie responded, “No.”) We strongly recommend that you never promise

a new bottom you won't leave marks, because different skins react very differently to the same stimulus and you can never know for sure how *this* bottom's body will react.

Cuttings or piercings intended to be temporary can sometimes leave marks that last a lot longer than intended, so even if someone gives you permission to open their skin it's not a good idea to carve your initials on their ass, or indulge a taste for silly graffiti. The skin should probably not be opened at all without consent, and deliberate permanent marks must always be negotiated.

- ***Pain.*** It's easy to assume that any bottom enjoys pain, so we will remind you that Dossie did not play with pain for her first several years in S/M: pain is an acquired taste for a lot of folk. We are both very happy that we've acquired it, but would still look askance at someone who would inflict intense pain on us without some reason to believe that we would enjoy it.
- ***Humiliation.*** For some bottoms, feeling embarrassed, humiliated or even degraded is a pungent erotic thrill, and for others it's an infuriating insult. And to make things even more complicated, different people feel humiliated by different things: for one man, crossdressing is acute humiliation, while for another it's fun costumery. So if your bottom tells you that he loves or hates humiliation, be sure to find out what kinds of humiliation he loves or hates.
- ***Phobias and turnoffs.*** Many of us have one or more psychological phobias, images or associations – rape, slavery, prostitution, child abuse and Nazis are common ones – that make us so unhappy or frightened in the real world that we do not wish to play with them in S/M. Some people have serious phobias about needles, fire,

electricity or blood, and may not be sophisticated enough to know that these can be S/M activities: we do play with fear, but we do so consensually. Few people assume an easy comfort level with shit, and piss is more accepted in some communities than others.

- ***High-risk play.*** Some forms of play have much higher risks of injury or death than others. Breath control and electricity can stop hearts, sometimes permanently. Firearms play, no matter how careful you think you're being with an "unloaded" gun, can go tragically wrong, as can playing with real-world danger like speeding cars and skyscraper balconies. And then there's play with serious social risks, like getting caught by your mother. Play involving drugs or alcohol impairs bottoms' perception of damage being done to their bodies, and reduces tops' judgment and inhibitions. There's room for difference of opinion about the thin line between "very risky" and "too dangerous to do at all" – but if you're playing anywhere close to that line, we think your play requires both partners' explicit consent, and a lot of planning for safety.
- ***Limits of scene space.*** Scenes that expand the agreed-upon limits of scene space require special consent – for instance, inviting other people to join a scene should be checked with your bottom, because if you get your bottom all tied up and hot and bothered and then introduce your three friends who just arrived, she might get a little outraged. You also include additional, nonconsensual participants if you play visibly in public, like if you chain your bottom to a parking meter and go inside for a cappuccino. It is very important to have explicit consent if you want to record a scene in photos or on video or audiotape: many people have strong and

valid limits about pictures of themselves in extremely embarrassing positions possibly being seen by other people.

- ***Emotional limits.*** Scenes likely to evoke profound emotional conflict require special consent, both from the bottom and from the top. Such scenes may involve abandonment, betrayal, extreme humiliation, regression to child or baby states, and real-world emotions, especially anger. These are all “button-pushers,” and can evoke much more extreme responses than you bargained for. We find it particularly important to agree that we will not take anger we have about real conflict into a scene – even if you and your bottom are in a relationship in which you have the right to punish him, it’s generally not a good idea to punish in anger.

LIMITS FOR TOPS

As tops, we have the same responsibility as bottoms to know our own limits. We can start by being honest about what we want and what we don’t want. A good exercise to clarify this is called “Yes, No and Maybe.” Make a list of all the sexual and BDSM activities you can think of, and then divide them into three categories – *yes*, *no* and *maybe*. *Yes* is what you know you like, *no* is what you know you don’t like, and *maybe* is all those things that might be hot if the time were right, or you were really turned on, or you could get someone who already knows how to teach you. This exercise can be fun to do with your partner or in a group – but if you feel that to be a real stud top you ought to be ready for anything, maybe you should try it alone the first time so you can be honest with yourself. On your *yes* list you will probably find plenty of things you like, and the *maybe* list promises plenty of hot stuff to explore. Respect your own *no* list as you would your bottom’s.

It is particularly important to know and honor the limits of your knowledge and skill. It can be embarrassing if a bottom approaches you with a new eight-foot bullwhip and wants you and only you to crack it over his or her ass, forcing you to admit that you have no idea how to operate that thing. But remember, it would be a lot more embarrassing if you tried to do it and failed, and even worse if you wound up injuring the bottom – a very real possibility, as throwing a bullwhip is dangerous and requires a tremendous amount of training and practice.

If your fantasy of being a top requires you to be all-knowing, that's a fine fantasy, and you still have to know your limits. Good bottoms will respect your honesty – at least, if we said we'd never done something before and were feeling uncertain about it, and a bottom said "Aw, c'mon," we would wonder a lot about that bottom's respect for safety.

MAKING ROOM FOR YOUR OWN NEEDS. Where do sex and physical stimulation for the top fit into your scene agenda? Many of us have some difficulty feeling like a big bad top when we are on our backs with our legs in the air squealing in ecstasy. Some tops like to focus on what they are doing to the bottom during the scene, and arrange for their own orgasm afterwards. Some of us top first, then switch to the bottom role to get stimulated. Some of us order our bottoms not to touch us at all during a scene because it is distracting.

Here's an intriguing script for a switching scene that was negotiated by a top who had a yen for some downtime:

A hapless bottom has been kidnapped into the harem of the Sultan Of Whatever to be trained as a pleasure slave. The training begins with innocence violated, our heroine bound and chained, helpless to resist the sensual invasion of the skillful slave trainer, etcetera. Then, somehow, the erstwhile slave escapes and manages to tie up her master, and (with a surprisingly active

imagination for such an innocent maiden) takes her revenge by winding leather cords tightly around his cock and balls, and hanging weights from his scrotum with mean little clothespins.

Then, the evil slave master gets loose and again, our poor heroine is bound, subjected to terrible punishments and thoroughly ravished, to the satisfaction of both the players on this private stage.

Who says you can't have your cake and eat it too?

You can make a space during your scene for your own stimulation, and you can negotiate that with your bottom. For instance, you might like a butt plug in your ass and a vibrator on your cock or clit while your pleasure slave pulls on the chain between your nipple clamps – so why not? Bottoms may or may not have access to a whole lot of initiative while they are in role, but most of them are good at following directions. So make a clear agreement with your bottom before the scene starts, untie your bottom and order him or her to molest you in your favorite way when the time is right, and remember that your bottom, just like you, might need to focus on what he is doing to you – so this might not be the best time to yank off a clamp while your tender parts are between his teeth. Or then again..

interlude 3

A role-play scene, played by "Akasha," a novice top friend.

I woke up with great difficulty and realized my mind was full of thoughts of domination, weird fantasies about devices that I did not own but wished I did. I thought of my friend Richard, and a wonderful night we had shared many months before.

I called him and found him still in bed. I said, "God, I am really having a problem today."

He shifted in his sheets, I could hear it, and said, "Hungry?"

I was doodling, cracking pencil leads and then throwing them away. "Yes," I said, and I was sort of half shaking, just wanting to make him beg on the phone, make him get out of his warm bed and kneel down, make him whimper, do anything. But I wanted more, so I held back and asked him to see me.

He half moaned and sighed, yawned again, and told me he had class that night. I told him to meet me afterward. He paused, and I felt like I was going to die.

"Richard, please. I'm going crazy. Do this for me, OK?"

"You want to hurt me?" he said softly, making me face it. This was back when it was still hard for me to accept that I enjoyed making men suffer.

It's difficult to describe what a day like that feels like, waiting for the hours to go by, trying to concentrate on work, going one step at a time.

When I am in that mindframe I can smell everything in the air, I can feel mist against my face in the cold air. The moon is more illuminated, the sound of my feet in puddles as I walk somehow thrills me with a feeling of authority.

I arrived at the cafe a few minutes early and waited in the lobby. Richard arrived a few minutes late. When I stood up and hugged him he laughed softly into my ear, "How're you doing?"

I just moaned and started fingering his hair, tugging at it a little. We parted and I looked at him again, blinking. I felt weak, numb. I wanted to take him by the hair and force him to his knees. Instead I said weakly, "You probably haven't eaten yet. Can I buy you dinner?"

When his food arrived I stole his silverware and he laughed. "I'm serious," I told him in a low voice. "I am feeding you this entire meal."

His eyes searched around the room and he lowered his voice, "Come on, people will see. We can take care of you when we get home. Let me eat."

Any other night I wouldn't think twice about him eating dinner across from me. But in that mood, on that night, I wanted to be the one feeding him. I wanted to make him part his lips each time I lifted the spoon. I wanted to make him beg with his eyes for more, or look at me longingly. Or I wanted to force him to do it.

I leaned over the table and we argued a bit about it, finally compromising in that I would feed him the first few bites and then let him finish. Knowing that he hated doing it but would submit to it for a few minutes was enough for now.

When we got into my room he sat on the edge of my bed then finally lay down, spreading his arms out and sighing tiredly. I slid down and moved on top of him, moving my hands up to his wrists and holding them down there. His eyes flickered open and he stared at me expressionlessly, waiting.

I consider it true, deep headspace when I am capable, without hesitation, of exercising acts of cruelty or power as if they were second nature. These are things that I would never do in a normal state of mind. On that night I slipped into it relatively easily, maybe because I had been lingering around the edges of it for so long.

I set up a series of short scenes, because my appetite was varied and I wanted to satisfy it all. Sometimes I want total resistance, sometimes I want fear, sometimes I want pathetic, eager submission. That night I wanted them all.

I used every single restraint device on him that I had, in every position I could imagine. I kept a hand over his mouth most of the night and wrestled him to the ground three or four different times, ordering him to feign resistance until I hurt him into submitting.

I roleplayed kidnapping him, interrogating him, seducing him, and fucking him. I had an orgasm just from the way he felt against me as I took him against his will, one hand holding his head back by a fistful of hair and the other over his mouth to muffle his protests.

For the grand finale I put him in my chair and handcuffed his wrists behind his back, taking my wall mirror down and putting it behind him so I could see his wrists and enjoy the way they looked while still facing him.

I put water in his hair to simulate sweat and messed it up, tied his ankles together, and told him I was going to kill him.

He put his head down solemnly and I walked around a bit, touching his skin gently, telling him how pretty and helpless he looked. He shifted, and struggled uselessly, then lifted his head to me and looked at me with his teeth clenched, saying "You have to let me go. Don't do this to me."

I leaned down and held his face in my hands, putting my lips close to his, licking them gently. "Kiss me goodbye, my tortured slave."

He shut his eyes and leaned forward to kiss me, hungry, passionate, as if to seduce me with his mouth and tongue. This kiss was long, desperate, and when I broke from it he was breathing hard.

His eyes were pleading, yet strong. "I'm not afraid to die," he said softly.

He always knew the things to say. He was begging, yet he was strong. He was submitting, but he was still powerful. He amazed me.

We had played these execution scenes before so I didn't need to give him any instruction. He was to pretend he had about three minutes left to live, locked in some airtight chamber or given some poisonous gas, and he was to struggle yet remain brave until the moment I came to save him from his fate.

And he really knew how to play it. Perfectly, yet differently every time. The way he pulled at the handcuffs, letting them cut into his wrists as if it didn't matter,. The way he threw his head back to breathe with such pained difficulty, the way he looked at me through wet bangs with desperation, his lashes damp with tears.

I felt so close to orgasm, but it was a different sort of satisfaction. I just watched, emotionless, as his struggles became weaker and his breathing more labored.

Then it hit me, at once, it was like a sensual overload, like an orgasm but of the mind. I shivered, I felt a cold sweat on my body and suddenly I wanted to cry, I thought, "God, what am I doing to him?" I unfastened him quickly and slid into his arms, shaking, telling him I was sorry. He laughed softly into my ear and told me it was okay, that he was acting, and that I needn't feel bad.

But feeling bad makes me feel better, so I spent some time crying, letting him reassure me. We lay down in the bed together and eventually fell asleep after I had sufficient reassurance.

Waking up the next morning I felt a different kind of exhaustion. It's impossible to explain how much dom headspace rips the energy right out of you. Sometimes it takes me days to recover.

9

Go!

All the negotiation, planning, scheming and fantasizing in the world never quite prepare you for that moment when you're standing there, face to face with the bottom of your dreams, who is breathing a little bit fast and looking at you with an expectant gleam in his or her eyes. Omigod... *now* what am I supposed to do?

We suggest that before you get to that critical moment, you spend a little (or a lot of) time thinking your scene through. Try to build a fantasy around the person you're playing with and the kind of scene you've agreed to play. (Janet likes to do this while masturbating.) This doesn't have to be a narrative-type fantasy with plots and dialogue unless you want it to be – maybe your fantasy is about a particular energy or activity. Be as far out as you like in your fantasy; you can always revise later when you bring the fantasy into reality.

That fantasy will be the core of the scene you do together. We guarantee that the scene will not go exactly the way it did in

your fantasy... reality is never that willing to conform to our expectations. But if your fantasy has your gorgeous captive first kissing your boots, then getting trussed up like a Christmas turkey, then getting flogged and fucked, you have at least an outline for your scene.

Don't script too tightly. If your satisfaction in this scene depends on your bottom saying certain words, or resisting in just the right manner, you'd better make sure she knows it, or she is very likely to react the wrong way:

As part of a public demonstration, Janet, as the sadistic butch prison warden, was threatening Dossie, as the innocent and wrongly imprisoned "good girl," with a cavity search. It would have been very inappropriate to actually *do* a cavity search in front of an audience of strangers, so Janet assumed that Dossie would resist, thus giving The Warden an excuse to punish The Girl. Unfortunately, she forgot to mention this plan to Dossie, who got deeply enough into the role that it didn't occur to her to refuse – leaving Janet standing there with a glob of lube on her gloved finger and a foolish expression on her face, frantically trying to signal Dossie that she should please for heaven's sake resist so they could get on with the scene.

Janet made the mistake of overplanning – of making the scene dependent on the bottom's reaction, without ensuring that the bottom would react the way she needed. If you want your bottom to resist, to capitulate, to beg or to struggle, you'd better make that desire clear up front or you're likely to get stuck improvising in ways that might not work for either of you.

On the other hand, underplanning – going into a scene with no idea of what you're going to do or what sequence you're

going to do it in – is a surefire recipe for what Dossie calls “blank-paperitis,” that brain-dead feeling when you look at the bottom and can’t begin to imagine what might be a good thing to do next.

We like to go into a scene with an “outline” of possible activities – a menu that we can move through or skip around or even ignore if we think of something better to do, but that’s always there to fall back on if we feel stuck. Janet likes to plan an outline with two or three times as many items on it as she could ever actually do in a single scene, so she has plenty of choices and can go with the flow of her own energy and the bottom’s reactions.

WHAT DO YOU DO FIRST?

Well, first you panic – at least a little. This is the challenging point. But have courage. Remember, we have faith in you.

In the beginning, your job is to get both yourself and your bottom into a sexy, susceptible headspace: a space in which you are powerful and terrible, and he is malleable and helpless before your implacable will.

We find that it’s a good idea to start a scene with some sort of ritual that defines the beginning of the scene and starts to get everybody turned on. A hug is good for scenes that have a nurturing, connected feeling. For a slave-type scene, you can have a ritual of putting on the bottom’s collar: many tops like to have their bottoms kneel at their feet and kiss the collar before it is placed around the bottom’s neck. Touching the bottom’s shoulders, back or neck establishes connection in a relaxed and soothing way. Simply standing the bottom a few feet away and having her hold quite still, with eyes lowered, and then turn around slowly – while you examine every inch of her body, your eyes burning with lust – can be a hot beginning. Janet sometimes likes to have the bottom leave the room and come back in, with

the understanding that once she re-enters the room, the scene has begun. Putting on some bondage can be a good start for many scenes. In other words, just about any beginning can work, as long as it serves the dual purpose of connecting you and your partner and turning you on.

GETTING YOURSELF TURNED ON. If you're lucky, you'll already be turned on and feeling like the King or Queen of Hell before you begin – but neither of us is usually that lucky; we usually have to *do* something to get turned on and into top space.

Is there something physical that you know turns you on, makes you feel toppy? Janet feels toppy when someone kneels in front of her and sucks her nipples. Do you like having your boots kissed? Your feet rubbed? Is there a name you like to be called? Tell your bottom how to do what you like; be specific. He'll start to feel submissive and under your control, and you'll start to get turned on.

Sometimes you can convince yourself that you're a top simply by acting like one. Be bossy, be forceful – it's okay if it doesn't feel "natural" at first; imitate your favorite movie villain, or a top whose style you've admired at parties. As you start to act like a top, you'll probably start to feel a little excited. And the more turned on you feel, the more natural the topping will seem, and the more turned on you'll get, so you'll do more, and get more turned on, and...

Your bottom will notice your arousal and your toppiness and start to get turned on, too, and will add his energy to the drama you're building. And before you know it, there you'll both be – nicely in role, wildly excited and having an absolutely wonderful time.

BUILDING. Once you've established scene space with a proper beginning, you can start building some momentum. For most scenes, you want to begin slowly and build gradually.

(Interrogation, terror and punishment scenes can be exceptions.) If you're playing with sensation, start with the gentlest – sensual stroking or erotic pinching, or some slow-building strokes from a nice soft thuddy flogger. If your scene is more about domination and control, you may want to start with some orders that you know the bottom will not find too intense (either too demanding or too rewarding) – some posture training, say, or an order for the bottom to lightly stimulate you to get you in the mood. Save the really difficult tasks for later when the bottom is “warmed up” and deeply into role, and the activities you know she really loves as a reward for doing the difficult ones.

Escalate slowly. If you've started with your softest mellowest flogger, step up to something a bit heavier. Add a bit more bondage to restrict your captive's movement a little more. Start getting a bit pickier about how your commands are carried out. Challenge your bottom by requiring him to do something that requires concentration as he accepts increasing stimulation. (Janet once played with a top who required that she address him by obscene names, each one different, as he caned her: “One, thank you, dickhead! Two, thank you, fuckwad! Three, thank you, shit-for-brains!”)

You don't have to continue to escalate; one of the arts of topping is to take the bottom right up to the edge where she thinks she can't stand it any more, then back off for a while and do something nicer, then go up to that same place and perhaps a little beyond, then back off again...

IMPULSE TOPPING. Occasionally, while partway into a scene that you've planned carefully, you'll be struck by a sudden inspiration. Following your instinct at such a moment can be risky, particularly if the bottom is expecting something different. But, if your inspiration isn't a limit for the bottom, it may turn out to be your intuition guiding you toward something

wonderful; some of our best moments in scene have been impromptu impulses of this kind.

On the other hand, sometimes you'll come up totally dry – with a bad case of the “blank-paperitis” we mentioned earlier. A good strategy here is to do whatever worked last time, or, if you're in the middle of a scene, you can backtrack to do some more of whatever was working well earlier: there's no rule against more of a good thing.

One top we know taught us another excellent strategy for this moment: do nothing. Simply stop and re-center yourself. Take a deep breath or two. Look at yourself and your bottom. Wait. Inspiration will come. The bottom isn't going anywhere. This can seem like a very long moment, but really, it's usually only a minute or so... and many bottoms love suspense.

KEEPING IT GOING

Good tops are full of all kinds of sneaky ways to keep a scene going without breaking its energy.

A lot of the ideas we'll talk about in this section fall into two categories: ways to keep the energy going in a scene that is supportive and nurturing, and ways to accomplish the same goal in a scene that's harsh and is built around a fantasy of nonconsent. In both cases, you're trying to do the same things – to get support and information for yourself and to provide support and encouragement for your bottom – but the way that you accomplish those goals will depend on what role you're playing.

TAKING CONTROL. An important thing to remember is that your goal is to “turn off your bottom's brain” – to enable her to melt into a malleable, will-less state of arousal and hypersensuality. The more control, verbal and physical, that you exert, the easier it will be for your bottom to relinquish control to you.

It's a good idea to offer your bottom as few choices as possible. "Lie down on the bed" is not such a great order, because it leaves too many questions open in the bottom's mind. "Lie down on the bed, face down, with your head facing the headboard, your legs together and your arms outspread" is better.

You may still want to offer your bottom choices as part of a head trip – "Six with the cane or 50 with the flogger? You choose." But do so intentionally, and make it clear that you're offering the choice not because you're floundering but because you enjoy seeing the bottom struggle with the decision.

It can work very well to take control of a bottom in a physical way as well: pushing, grabbing, dragging, holding down. We did a scene that played with this sense of physical control:

Dossie was a recently captured slavegirl in a country where she didn't speak the language; Janet was a new owner who wasn't the talkative type. While Dossie begged, whined, offered bribes, fumed and refused, Janet simply physically forced her (with a little help from a few floggers and canes and paddles) to kneel, to dance, to suck Janet's breasts, to masturbate, and other critical "slave skills." For a couple of verbalists like us, it was a fabulously freeing scene – Dossie couldn't talk her way out of it, and Janet found herself able to be physically rough, with hairpulling, shoving, armtwisting and so on, in a way that's usually difficult for her.

Giving clear, forceful directions can be difficult for many tops, perhaps especially women, who are culturally enjoined against being directive. An exercise Janet teaches in her workshops for novice female dominants is to have the bottoms rub their mistresses' feet as the mistresses give specific directions about where to rub, how hard and in what rhythm. Although this

exercise may sound simple, it is difficult for many attendees. If you have trouble giving orders, it might be a good way for you to practice this important skill.

ASKING FOR DIRECTION. While the fantasy of much BDSM is that the top is taking his or her pleasure without regard to what the bottom wants, the reality is that you're doing this for mutual enjoyment – and you can't attain mutual enjoyment without some guidance from your bottom about what he is enjoying. But most bottoms don't like to feel like they're running the scene: if they wanted to run scenes, they'd be tops. So you need to figure out ways to get the information you need without seeming to relinquish control.

The ritual of requiring the bottom to kiss the whip or other implement is really a script for consent. The threat builds anticipation while giving the bottom an opportunity to voice any concerns. Others enjoy having the bottom choose which toy he wants to experience; we know one who likes to lay out all his toys, then tell his bottom, "Bring me one item to give you pain and one to give you pleasure."

Other ways of asking for direction are verbal – and in these, tone of voice and turn of phrase matter a lot. You know and we know that the sentences "I'd like to cane you now, would that be OK?" and "You're about to get a caning you'll never forget, you little slut" really mean pretty much the same thing, but they certainly don't feel the same to your bottom.

The trick to asking for direction from top space is to phrase the request in such a way that it sounds like you're demanding it for your own pleasure, not fumbling around trying to figure out what will please your bottom.

HOW TO BE SUPPORTIVE. Bottoms need a lot of support when they're doing their thing, and, depending on the flavor of scene you're doing, there are a lot of different ways you can offer it.

If a bottom is doing something intense and difficult to please you, she deserves and needs praise. If your scene has a nurturing tone, you simply may want to offer that praise: “I’m proud of you” or “You took that really well” or “You look so beautiful doing that.” On the other hand, very few interrogators compliment their victims on how well they take their torture. So if you’re role-playing a scene of nonconsent or harshness, you have to be more subtle – but a muttered comment about the stubbornness of this particular victim accomplishes the same goal without breaking role: “Ah, she has spirit, I like that! More to break.”

A particularly devious top trick is to use the lowered boundaries of scene space to “implant” messages of self-esteem. We’ve done a couple of scenes together in which Janet is a schoolmistressy authority figure and Dossie is a young girl; Janet enjoys telling Dossie that “a pretty little thing like you is going to be *very* popular with the big girls around here” – creating a nice sense of dread as she builds Dossie’s mental self-image.

It can also be very helpful to “coach” your bottom through the tough parts by reminding him or her to do things like breathe and relax, kind of like a labor coach in childbirth. If you’re being a supportive top, you can simply tell your bottom what you want her to do: “breathe along with me” or “relax your butt muscles” or “listen to the music.” If you’re being a mean top, you may have to get a little more creative. “I want to hear you scream” accomplishes the same goal as reminding your partner to breathe (it takes oxygen to scream), but sends shivers up the spine in a totally different way. You can also *order* your bottom to do something like relaxing her muscles, with appropriate penalties if she tenses up.

CHECKING IN. Since bottoms occasionally forget how to safeword for one reason or another, we think it’s a good idea for

a top to have a mechanism she can use to “check in” to make sure that everything’s still basically OK.

Many people check in verbally. “Still with me?” or “Do you remember your safeword?” are easy and readily understandable. However, they can be inappropriate for some scenes (prison guards rarely ask their victims if they’re enjoying themselves), plus bottoms can sometimes get too nonverbal to respond properly.

In his book *SM 101: A Realistic Introduction*, Jay Wiseman suggests the “two squeezes” check-in: the top takes hold of some part of the bottom’s body (often the hand) and gives it two firm squeezes. The bottom lets the top know that she’s OK by taking hold of some part of the top’s body and giving it two squeezes back. If the top doesn’t get the two return squeezes, he tries once again; if the squeezes still aren’t forthcoming, he assumes that something’s wrong and that it’s time to break role and talk.

Other forms of check-in are physical: looking for welts to make sure the whip is landing in the right places, watching for changes in breathing or sound, feeling bound hands and feet to make sure they’re still warm and getting enough circulation. Such check-ins also get you close to your bottom’s body, which he usually doesn’t mind.

CALIBRATING YOUR BOTTOM. Many tops, when playing for the first time with a new bottom (or with a new toy on a long-time bottom), use some variant of a “one to ten” strategy. Usually, the top gives the bottom a very gentle stimulus and says, “That was a ‘one’ on a scale of one to ten. When you’re ready for another one, say a number that tells me how intense you want it.” The top spends several minutes letting the bottom “call the shots” in this way, learning about the bottom’s reactions as she goes. Eventually, when the bottom seems to be getting a little bored, the top says, “If you’re ready to stop calling numbers and let me decide force and timing on my own, let me know.” The

bottom can go on one-to-tenning for as long as he needs to feel comfortable, and the top gets a good idea of how well the bottom can handle this particular sensation.

BOTTOMLESS PITS AND “THE FOREVER PLACE.”

Sometimes, a bottom will get so endorphined out or go under so deeply that she feels like she just wants to go on doing this forever and ever and ever. A bottom who is in this condition will not be able to tell you if you are doing damage to her body or mind. She may go very still, no longer struggling or making noise – this can be scary if you’re not ready for it. Or she may still be moaning and crying, but be unable to respond to simple questions or orders. Or she may seem fine – Dossie grins and giggles, appearing deceptively on top of it all, while Janet chatters nonchalantly.

If your bottom goes into “The Forever Place,” that places an extra burden of responsibility on you; she has no judgment, so you have to provide enough for both of you. Keep an extra-close eye on physical signals like welts, bruises, abrasions and blisters, and watch for dizziness, trembling and nausea (all signs that the bottom is beginning to “overload” and may be on the verge of fainting). Be ultra-respectful of the limits the two of you agreed on beforehand: a bottom in “The Forever Place” may be absolutely thrilled to see the brass knuckles that she said “absolutely not” to, but that doesn’t make it OK to use them – such a bottom’s consent is no longer very meaningful.

Bottoms who never seem to get enough are called, somewhat ruefully, “bottomless pits.” Such bottoms can be frustrating for a top, because you can wear yourself to a sweating panting frazzle and still get a wistful “Are we done already?” for your trouble. Some tops like to keep one or more very intense toys or techniques for use in convincing the bottom who thinks she can never get enough.

Dossie remembers a public performance she once gave:

In the early '80s, two other women and I produced an erotic performance, the first public S/M demonstration in San Francisco woman-space as far as I know. We staged a kidnapping of a "random" victim from the audience (actually my lover), and made a big point of establishing consent so the audience wouldn't freak out – including having my "victim" select the whip I would beat her with, which was a relatively gentle braided cat. We had planned a counting scene for a birthday beating, in which she was supposed to control the length and intensity of the beating by counting strokes at the number she was comfortable with... so the scene started out "one – whack – two – whack – three – whack – three – whack – three – whack" and so on. Our agreement was that when we got close to her birthday age, I would hit her as hard as she liked and end at 33. Well, she got into the Forever Place and forgot she was supposed to want to stop, and kept counting "30, 30, 30." I couldn't get her attention, and I couldn't very well break the rules of play I had so carefully established, so eventually I had to give up, announce that she had won, congratulate her and escort her off the stage, hoping nobody would notice me shushing her when she wanted to know why I had stopped when it was feeling so good.

CLOSURE. Ending the scene is one of the most important factors in helping make sure you and your bottom will both remember the scene fondly later. A sudden, unexpected or clumsy ending can take all the joy out of a scene that's been pretty nice up until that moment.

Ending a scene takes place in three parts: preparation, closure and aftercare. During the preparation stage, while you're still actually playing, you need to signal to the bottom that the scene will end soon, so he can begin to come back into the real world and pull himself or herself together. Dossie likes to pick out a fairly heavy toy such as a cane, show it to the bottom, and ask the bottom to pick how many heavy strokes between one and ten (or 20, or 50) he is ready to take before ending the scene.

If your scene is more about control than sensation, you may want to give the bottom a particularly difficult task – “repeat the following phrase 100 times, without error, while acting as my footstool” – with the understanding that the scene will end when he completes the task to your satisfaction. You can string something like this out according to your own judgment by choosing how picky you want to get about what constitutes successful completion of the task.

Janet remembers:

I was doing an ageplay scene in which I was a very naughty nine-year-old girl and my Daddy, having spanked me thoroughly, was making me write a letter of apology to the principal of my school. I was so completely in role that my handwriting was the Palmer cursive which was taught to children when I was young (and with which I had struggled in great frustration in grade school). As he rejected one draft after another – too messy, too short, not apologetic enough – I sank deeper and deeper into role, and got more and more frustrated with my poor handwriting. Fortunately, he saw that I was growing genuinely upset, and chose that moment to “accept” my latest draft – even though it was not as good as some of the previous ones.

The main thing to remember about closure is to avoid suddenness. Withdrawing from your bottom while she's still floating around out in bottom space is clumsy and unkind, and can feel like a dreadful abandonment. Give your partner plenty of warning, in whatever way works for both of you, that the scene is drawing to an end.

WINDING DOWN. After the formal scene is over, most players want and need some decompression time – hugging, cuddling, talking, dozing, eating, showering, whatever it takes to stabilize both of you back in the real world. (We offered a fairly lengthy set of suggestions for decompression in *The New Bottoming Book*.) It's not a good idea to let your bottom attempt complex or dangerous tasks right after a scene, when he may still be endorphined out and perhaps still in suggestible bottom space.

An S/M scene is not over until both (or all) of you have returned to the real world, to a more or less functional mental state, intimately connected and happy as clams, albeit perhaps a little stupid. This is a good time to relax and enjoy the connection. Some traditions have it that after a scene the bottom should scurry about and clean up the toys, but we prefer to wait until the bottom is recovered enough to do so without breaking anything. We like to respect and enjoy the general incompetence of warm fuzzy endorphined-out bottoms, and share in that state ourselves.

So invest some time in snuggling, sharing something to eat or drink, perhaps a warm bath (hot tubs are great for this!). You can rub any sore muscles, or have your bottom rub yours. Putting icepacks on bruises, brushing hair, washing any body parts that might have gotten sticky – grooming behaviors feel good here, and are a nice way to indicate caring nurturance.

Sometimes, especially after a particularly intense scene when you've been a very good top, your bottom may need support in returning to normal consciousness. If your bottom spaces out

and you feel like you can't quite reach him or her, stay close and in physical contact. If you stay connected, you can probably enjoy the spaced-out feeling too. Allow a little time. Call the person by name; Dossie likes to blow in her ear. Touch her firmly, rub muscles, and gently move joints. A glass of water or something to eat is always grounding. Ask about the journey – talking gets us back in our heads – and welcome your friend back. Remember, if your bottom goes very far out it's probably because you were a very good top.

And how about you? How do you return to normal consciousness after you've been playing God? It's a mistake to think that aftercare is offered for the bottom's sake only. Many tops need this kind of warmth and reassurance as well, to remind them that they're not really the mean nasty horrible bullies they were acting like just a few minutes before. And you probably don't want to try running a staff meeting or driving the Indy 500 right after a scene, either; tops get endorphin-y, too, and bossy top energy – which can be a problem in the real world – can't be turned off like a faucet.

So share the cool-down cycle with your bottom. Luxuriate. If there's something you like after a scene, let your bottom know, and help your bottom take care of you. If your orgasm is scheduled for after the scene, check in with your bottom to make sure she has recovered enough to make love to you with all the energy and focus you've been looking forward to – you'll get the best treatment if you're not in a hurry. Remember, you're playing with someone you *like* (at least we hope you are!); take the time to enjoy her company as you float gently back to reality.

10

AND IF IT DOESN'T GO THE WAY YOU PLANNED?

We believe that if you never ever ever have a scene go haywire, with unexpected physical or emotional consequences, you may not be taking enough risks. After all, the reason most of us do S/M is to explore territories that we find a little risky and challenging; if you're sticking so close to the center of the trail that you never get lost in the woods, you may want to reconsider your pathway.

The standard by which tops should be judged isn't in whether their scenes ever go wrong (within, of course, basic standards of safety and consent); it's in how well they handle it when things *do* go wrong. So let's talk a bit about the kinds of things that cause problems in scenes, and how you can handle them when they come up.

EMOTIONAL GLITCHES. In our experience, by far the most common scene mishap is an unforeseen emotional reaction on the part of a participant – panic, anger, grief, regression or other

intense emotion. Freak-outs happen for a variety of reasons: flashbacks to buried memories of abuse or trauma; one or another partner “forgetting” that the scene is supposed to be playful and consensual, and getting the role and the reality confused; real-world emotion inadvertently sneaking into scene space: the possibilities are manifold.

There is no way to reliably prevent emotional mishaps, but there are ways to minimize their frequency. Nobody knows themselves well enough to predict *all* their own reactions and hot buttons, but telling your partner about aspects of your background or belief system will help him or her to steer clear or navigate cautiously. (Yes, we’re off on that old honesty thing again.) Similarly, you should try to play with people who you trust to share this kind of information openly with you, so you don’t cavalierly snap your snazzy new Smith and Wesson handcuffs onto someone who was recently brutalized by an abusive cop. (This doesn’t mean you should never play around someone’s traumas, but it does mean you should do so only with proper negotiation, safeguards and cautions – see Chapter 14 for more information.)

Still, with all the good intentions and good negotiations in the world, freak-outs will happen. And your first challenge as a top is to figure out when they’re happening, which may not always be as easy as it seems. Someone who’s freaking out may be unable to use their safeword, so you can’t rely on that signpost. A sudden and dramatic change in response – when someone who’s been thrashing and screaming suddenly gets quiet and still, or someone who’s been acting happy and turned on suddenly begins to cry or struggle – is cause for concern. So is an unwillingness or inability to respond to simple questions or directions. A freak-out may be subtler than that... Janet remembers:

I was doing a scene with a regular but still fairly new play partner – basically a straightforward cock & ball torture scene, although we'd been discussing beforehand his fantasy about being a captive soldier getting tortured by an Indian maiden. Things were going along fine for an hour or so. I noticed at one point, though, that he had turned his head so that we were no longer making eye contact, and he didn't seem to be talking much. I asked, "Are you still with me?" and he responded in sort of an odd voice, "I'm not sure..." so I got him out of the bondage fast. Later, he explained that the fantasy had started to seem real to him – he was really beginning to believe that he was going to be tortured slowly to death – and that any safewords or similar communication would have been perceived by his "torturer" as a sign of weakness, so all he dared do was turn his head and hope that if it really was still me, I'd notice.

Unfortunately, most of the signs that something has gone wrong can, under other circumstances or with other bottoms, be signs that everything is going exactly *right*: some bottoms love to cry in scene, and a bottom who's left his or her body in bliss acts pretty much like one who's withdrawn in terror. So to find out what's going on, you have to ask.

First, try one of the check-ins we mentioned in the previous chapter. If your bottom can't or won't respond, you should probably assume that he's in trouble.

Your strategy now will be a stronger version of the decompression you use at the end of a scene. First, get out of role yourself – your bottom doesn't need a schoolmistress

right now, he needs a friend. Quickly and calmly remove any bondage or restraints; find out if he wants any scene symbols such as collars removed – some bottoms want them off right away, while others may feel rejected and abandoned if you remove them. Make sure he is physically warm – being wrapped in a cozy blanket feels very good to someone who's feeling emotionally chaotic.

Then, just put your arms around your partner and wait. Don't try to initiate conversation at first unless he seems to want to talk; let your bottom come back from whatever scary or angry or sad place he's in at an appropriate pace. It may be difficult at this point to suppress your own need for reassurance – you may, quite understandably, be feeling very scared and guilty – but now isn't the time to take care of you, it's the time to take care of your bottom. Later, when he is feeling better, you can get some support for yourself.

As the bottom starts to come back, he may want to talk about what went wrong, or he may just want to be taken care of some more. Supplying a snack to elevate blood sugar and a beverage to rehydrate is very smart. He might want to be put to bed to sleep off the stress of the freak-out, or to be given a nice warm bath.

In a few cases, the bottom may have gone into an angry enough place that he isn't able to accept touch or conversation or nurturing from you at all. This will probably be *very* difficult for you to handle without tapping into anger or defensiveness of your own. Leave the room for a while if necessary and let your bottom work through the anger solo; don't push limits here. After a while, you can check in and see if he is calmed down a bit and ready to accept some help from you.

It is possible that an emotional mishap in scene may open up an old wound that is deep enough to require professional

help from a therapist. While we do not believe that you have an obligation to help with the financial burdens of such therapy, we think it's appropriate for you to be as emotionally supportive as possible for a friend who is doing this difficult work.

PHYSICAL MISHAPS. Unless you have aim like Annie Oakley's and you play only with bottoms who are in perfect health, it is reasonable to be prepared for physical problems to come up during your scene. These may range from strokes that land off-target or clamps that get placed on tender nerves to heart attacks and seizures.

If the physical problem is due to a mistake of yours, the way to handle it depends on the flavor of the scene you're playing. It's imperative, though, that you acknowledge the mistake somehow – if the bottom thinks you're not aware that you goofed, she will start to wonder what else you're not noticing, and to withdraw trust from you.

If you're simply exploring sensations together, there's nothing at all wrong with saying "Oops!" or "Sorry!" But if you're supposed to be an all-knowing mistress or a terrifying interrogator, this won't cut it. Sometimes, simply putting your hand on the place where the mistake happened and giving a quick comforting rub is enough to let the bottom know that you're aware things didn't feel the way they were supposed to. If you're really playing a mean role, you might try a phrase like "Yes, that *did* hurt, didn't it?" (Maniacal laughter is optional.)

If you make too many mistakes, or they're too serious, the bottom may want to stop the scene – and who can blame her? Spend a lot of time with this bottom deciding how to process your mistakes and whether or not to use this technique again, today or ever. Then get in a lot of practice

time with the technique, on yourself or on an inanimate object, so you don't make so many mistakes next time.

If the mistake is such that it requires first aid, don't try to stay in role – stop the scene and get your first aid kit. The two of you can decide together whether or not to resume the scene from where you left off.

Remember, the unwritten contract you make when you agree to top someone is that you will take care of her well-being as well as your own for the duration of the scene – if she gets sick or hurt, you're in charge, and good tops take that responsibility seriously. Very rarely, you will encounter a genuine physical emergency in your scene: common ones include nausea and/or vomiting, faints and falls; less common ones (thank heavens!) include seizures and heart attacks. A responsible top is prepared for these emergencies.

Don't put someone into standing bondage unless you know how you would get her down if she became faint – this is not too rare an occurrence. Panic snaps and winches can help. Keep appropriate shears, scissors or a knife at arm's reach so that you can cut a sick person out of her bondage in no more than 30 seconds to a minute. Know the location and phone number of your nearest emergency room. We also strongly encourage you to get proper first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation training. Some major urban areas offer pervert-only first aid and CPR training, but even if yours doesn't, contact the Red Cross and take one or more of their regular classes.

OUTSIDE-WORLD EMERGENCIES. We know of one scene in which the top, a professional dominant, had her client tied in elaborate spiderweb bondage to a table, with a big glass mirror suspended overhead so he could see his own helplessness. Both the top and the bottom shortly had the opportunity to explore more helplessness than they'd bargained for – the Loma

Prieta quake hit, the mirror began to lurch back and forth, and the lights went out. (Both of them got out okay – but we hear that the pro-domme’s playroom now features a Mylar mirror overhead, a blackout light in the outlet, and a pair of paramedic shears hanging on the wall.)

The outside world doesn’t always cooperate with your desire for a quiet, intense, uninterrupted scene, and a competent top is aware that reality sneaks up on us in unpredictable ways. Outside-world problems range from interruptions by non-scene folks – kids, parents, housemates, neighbors and so on – through “acts of god/dess” like fires, storms, earthquakes and power outages.

If your scene gets interrupted by a person, some quick explanations are in order. A child who walks in on his or her parents’ scene can often be reassured with a comparison to childhood games such as cowboys and Indians. The neighborhood cop, however, may need some serious briefing on basic standards of consent, and a lot of assurance that what he’s seeing isn’t abusive or assaultive behavior. Kidnap and similar scenes occasionally get interrupted by well-meaning onlookers – try to do your scene in a way that avoids this problem, since you don’t want someone genuinely attacking you thinking they’re heroically saving your bottom from criminal assault.

If the interruption is on a less personal basis – say, Hurricane Dora – you’ll have to think and act fast and accurately. Be prepared to undo bondage, and have clothing available for yourself and your bottom. Remember, your bottom has entrusted his well-being to you.

AFTERSHOCKS (NOT THE SEISMIC KIND)

When you return to everyday awareness after even a very good scene, you could get a little shocked. What did you just do? Was it all right? Many tops experience feelings of guilt, shame

and horror that we could get so turned on, and so satisfied, by doing such awful things. You may need to reassure yourself that you are really an okay person, and that you have perfectly functional boundaries to your dark side. Let your bottom help you with this: she, after all, is eroticized to your nastiness, and in a good position to reassure you that the scene was consensual, safe, satisfying to the bottom, and just plain hot.

Anywhere from a few minutes to a day or two after a big scene, some tops experience “top drop.” You may feel down in the dumps, inadequate, like maybe the scene really wasn’t as hot as you thought it was – sometimes being a successful top can pose a major challenge to the maintenance of low self-esteem, so whatever part of you is responsible for maintaining your self-doubt may feel a need to be heard. You may find yourself questioning your sanity, tearing your scene apart with a tremendously critical eye, or convincing yourself that your bottom was just being polite when she was swooning in ecstasy. Or you may just feel kind of used up, low and tired.

This happens to a lot of us (it happens to bottoms, too, in a different way), so think of it like postpartum depression: you were just really high, so now the pendulum has swung the other way... and it will get back to the middle soon, really it will. This might be a good time to remind yourself of your respect for limits and safety, and to call your bottom or any other friend for a little reassurance.

Coming out of a role that is in any way parental (and how many top roles are not?) may be particularly difficult, as you may wake up internalized messages from your actual parents. When you get self-critical you may feel like a little kid who did something wrong – which makes it harder to stay centered, grounded and empowered.

Occasionally playing parents or bullies can open up old stuff inside you that you may not even remember having buried years ago. Memories and feelings from childhood traumas can cause particular problems, manifesting as memories you never had before, or recollections of body sensations, or disturbing dreams. If this starts happening to you, consider finding a good therapist. When events in the present open up fossilized conflicts, we all perceive this as confusing, painful or perhaps frightening. Please remember that when old wounds open it means a buried part of ourselves is now available to our consciousness, so there is an opportunity for healing, by knowing ourselves better and reclaiming parts of ourselves we may have had to abandon long ago.

11

TOYS FOR TOPS

Tops' toy collections can range from nothing at all – it's possible to do excellent S/M using nothing but your body and your imagination – through vast accumulations occupying several rooms of a household. Choosing toys that are appropriate to your play style and level of experience is a craft in itself: a classic novice's error is to choose hideous nasty vicious toys that no bottom in his right mind would allow an inexperienced top to use.

In cookbooks, kitchen equipment is known as the *batterie de cuisine*: a beginning cook is given a list of tools and supplies to start with, and a supplementary list of stuff to acquire later on for the master chef. We will do the same.

A BASIC TOY SELECTION

These basic toys are a “starter set”; we think they're the best tools to go out and buy as you begin your toy collection. Very few of them are likely to cost you more than \$40 or so, and if you're on a budget, you can often figure out less expensive

alternatives that you can create from household supplies or find at the thrift store, supermarket or hardware store. So, to get you started, we recommend:

ROPE. Choose something soft, washable and at least $\frac{3}{8}$ " thick; finish the ends with a piece of tape or stitch them with thread so they won't fray. Some folks swear by cotton magician's rope or soft nylon rope from the hardware store. Marine supply stores and mountain-climbing stores offer an enormous selection of excellent rope in different sizes, textures and colors. If you're just getting started, try 12-foot lengths of several different kinds and experiment with which you like best. Once you settle on one or two kinds, you'll probably want at least four 12-foot lengths; you'll probably want to add a couple of shorter or longer lengths once you learn more about what kinds of bondage you like to do.

RESTRAINTS. Unless you're very clever with knots, you'll find that a set of bondage cuffs for the wrists, and ideally a second set for the ankles, are a good investment. Try them on yourself before buying; tug the rings in all different directions to see if anything digs in or chafes, or if the cuff twists out of shape. Leather is nice if you can afford it, but there are good cuffs of nylon webbing which are strong and cheap. We don't recommend handcuffs or metal cuffs for beginners.

BLINDFOLD. The blindfold is a toy of such astonishing virtue that we had to set aside some space to talk about it. A blindfold can be a folded scarf or an Ace bandage, a nightshade from the drugstore or an elaborate leather mask from the toy store: no matter, they all work great.

To understand the power of the blindfold, try one on yourself. Feel the change in your state of consciousness, how quiet you become when you take away the busy distractions of sight,

how your consciousness moves away from the verbal entrainment of thought, how time passes in an easy flow in the trance of sensory deprivation.

It is a powerful act to take away someone's vision, to make him helpless, to make him dependent on you for most kinds of functioning. You can accentuate this feeling by taking your blindfolded bottom for a walk, or sending him to the bathroom in the darkness. Stay nearby, don't let your bottom fall.

There are practical advantages to blindfolding your bottom: then he can't see you fumble with the toys, or grab a clip to get your hair out of your eyes. We know a top who wears six-inch heels to tower over her bottoms, which she removes as soon as they can't see her anymore. So the blindfold offers privacy to the top, and relieves the bottom of the distractions of dealing with the material world. Check with your bottom before slipping on a blindfold, particularly if the two of you are new to one another – some bottoms find them too threatening for first-time play, and some need to take out their contact lenses first.

Blindfolds help to focus the bottom on what you are doing. Be aware that when you take away one sense, all others become accentuated. The blindfolded bottom will listen carefully, trying to figure out what you are going to do next – you can make this harder by playing music, or making noises on purpose to awaken his or her imagination.

Touch becomes triply intense for the blindfolded. Many tops try to maintain physical contact with a hand or a leg touching some part of the bottom's body at all times during the scene, while others may step back and let the bottom feel the abandonment of being blind and out of contact. Don't withdraw touch by accident – this is a powerful stimulus, and you want to stay purposeful with it. Don't

leave a blindfolded person alone in a room where you can't watch over him.

Dossie recalls a scene at the first all-woman play party in San Francisco, where four tops requested her assistance because their bottom had gone all ticklish and couldn't stop giggling. Blindfold to the rescue! The bottom calmed down right away, and so did all her nervous tops.

We love blindfolds. Blindfolds are wonderful. Get one now.

COLLAR. If you're really not interested in dominance & submission or role-playing, you can skip this one, but we've found that many bottoms appreciate being collared as a way to start the scene and to go into bottom space. A nice dog collar from the pet store doesn't cost much. 20" seems to work out about right unless you play with very large or muscular people. If you form an ongoing relationship with your submissive, buying him his own collar, rather than the "generic" one you keep in your toybag, can be a gesture of great symbolic weight.

CLAMPS. Wooden clothespins from the hardware store, or plastic ones from the Asian grocery, are some of the cheapest, most versatile toys available. If you're a novice, you probably won't need more than six or so, although some advanced players enjoy playing with dozens or even hundreds of clamps. Clamps can go just about anywhere you can pinch up a fold of skin – breasts, chests, arms, legs, genitals, buttocks, backs and more (not near the eyes, please). Know that if you leave a clamp on for a few minutes, it will hurt a lot more when it comes off. Practice on your own hide to get the feel.

CANDLES. Hot wax play offers a relatively safe way to explore some intense sensations. Use only plain white paraffin candles to start with – dyes and scents raise the melting temperature and can make the wax too hot for many bottoms. If

paraffin feels too intense, a milder alternative is the candles that come in tall glasses, sometimes with religious pictures on the side, which melt at a very cool temperature. Beeswax has a skin-burningly high melting point and should be avoided. As a rule of thumb, the softer the candle, the cooler the melting point of the wax – but you should test any wax on yourself before you drip it onto your bottom. An ice cube used alternately with dribbles of hot wax can create very interesting sensations.

SOFT FLOGGER. This is almost certainly going to be your biggest investment – but we find that more bottoms enjoy this sensation than any other, so if you can manage the \$100-\$150 such a toy is likely to cost, we encourage you to make the purchase. Shop at a store with clerks who can help you make a good selection. Try it on your thigh or arm, both softly and forcefully; you want something that gives a caressing, thuddy sensation, without too much sting or harshness; you may want to add other, harsher whips to your collection later. Such floggers are often made of suede, deerskin, elk, cabretta or buffalo hide. If you're short on cash and long on imagination, you can make a fine soft flogger by folding several lengths of soft rope in half, binding them together at the fold with tape or knots, and unraveling the ends, or by cutting strips from a discarded garment of soft suede or leather and folding them the same way. Practice with your flogger on a pillow, comforter or plush toy until you can consistently land the tips of the tails – the nastiest part – exactly where you aim them.

SLAPPER OR JOCKEY BAT. If you're only going to choose one toy for smacking (as opposed to flogging), we think it should be either a leather slapper – a two-layered paddle made of stiff but flexible leather, which makes a very

loud cracking noise but is unlikely to cause damage – or the short, broad-tipped riding crop called a “jockey bat.” In our opinion, the jockey bat looks hotter but the slapper feels better. Both are easy to control and give a sensation that many bottoms enjoy. If you use the jockey bat, hit with the tip only until you are much more experienced. Both toys are available in riding stores for \$10 or so.

SEX TOYS. If you want to get yourself and/or your bottom off, a good vibrator is a worthwhile investment. We prefer the plug-in or rechargeable kinds because their vibration is much stronger. If you play with bottoms who enjoy being vaginally or anally penetrated, you may want to add a dildo and/or butt plug as well. Anything used for penetration should first be covered with a condom, or else kept for one bottom.

SAFER SEX SUPPLIES. Unless you’re in a completely and consistently monogamous relationship, you should be putting latex or other barriers over anything that comes into contact with blood, semen, vaginal fluid, urine, feces and any other body fluids. Experiment with condoms until you find the ones you like (you may want some lubricated ones for penetration play and some unlubed ones for oral play). Get latex gloves in your size. Use dental dams or plastic wrap if you perform cunnilingus or have it performed on you. Try different water-based lubricants to see which you like; you may want to use a thinner, runnier lube for vaginal play and a thicker, gooier one for anal play. If you have trouble getting erect or getting off with a condom on, try masturbating with them until it feels easy and natural. Practice makes perfect.

EMERGENCY SUPPLIES. Your basic toy kit should contain a pair of heavy-duty shears such as paramedic’s shears, or a blunt-tipped sharp knife that can be run under rope or restraints without

poking the bottom's skin. You will also need to think about dealing with power outages, and many dungeons are dark, so keep a flashlight handy.

MORE ADVANCED TOYS

As you learn more play technique in general and develop your own specific style, you will probably want to collect more toys. Here are some of the ones we like:

HELPLESSNESS TOYS. You can make your partner helpless with anything from “pretend bondage” (“put your wrists behind your back and keep them there until I say you can move them”) through elaborate and expensive harnesses and body bags.

You can learn a lot about what kinds of helplessness you enjoy by experimenting with soft rope. If you find yourself attaching your partner's wrists to her thighs over and over again, you might want to acquire a set of restraints made especially for that position. If a bottom with arms pulled tightly back and chest thrust forward turns you on (and you play with people flexible enough to sustain this difficult position), a “mono-glove” that laces arms together behind backs might be a good investment. Posture collars hold the head high and restrict head and shoulder movement... yum. A field trip to your local leather emporium, or a delightful evening spent browsing through one of the good mail order catalogs, will yield up many such tantalizing possibilities – save up your pennies!

You can also make your partner helpless by taking away some of his or her senses. Blindfolds, as we noted earlier, boost sensation and sharpen focus. Earplugs cost almost nothing and help muffle sound but don't block it entirely; “noise-canceling” headphones eliminate background noise almost completely. Hoods of spandex or leather encase the entire head, taking away

the bottom's sight, smells, much of his hearing, even the feel of air currents on his face.

Gags require special care in selection – a too-large gag can leave a bottom with a sore jaw, or even choke him if it holds his mouth open too far for comfortable swallowing. The part that goes into the mouth *must* be firmly attached to the part that goes around the head so the bottom cannot swallow or inhale it. Janet prefers a gag that absorbs saliva, such as a square scarf folded diagonally with a large firm knot tied in the middle. Other tops like ball gags (many commercial ones are too large for the mouths of smaller bottoms, so you may have to make your own) or “bit”-type gags that place a leather bar in the bottom's mouth. No gag can stop a bottom from making any noise at all – grunts and muffled screams will still emerge, so don't count on your gag enabling you to do heavy pain play while Mom dozes lightly in the next room.

For complete helplessness and immobilization, many tops like to use some combination of kitchen-type plastic wrap or pallet wrap, plus sticky tape and, perhaps, a few sports bandages. With these few simple supplies, you can mummify a bottom so firmly that he can't move a muscle and can't even feel her own skin. (Dehydration is a danger here – give your bottom water with a sports bottle or baby bottle, and don't play this game in an overly warm or cold room.) You can carefully cut holes so you can get to the bottom's skin in those special places.

You may want to add some things for attaching people *to* in your bedroom or play space. An old-fashioned four-poster or brass bed is “deniable” and useful. Eyebolts in ceilings and walls can be explained away as “for plant hangers” when the folks come to visit – if you're not absolutely certain of your ability to center an eyebolt in a joist or stud, get professional help. Ottomans and “kneeling chairs” convert readily into spanking horses, and a little imagination and carpentry will enable you to create bondage

equipment that can be shoved into a closet or under the bed when you're not playing.

Of course, the more helpless you make your bottom, the more responsible you are for his or her well-being. If your bottom is in bondage, don't go out of earshot; if she's gagged as well, don't leave the room. When you've made someone as helpless as an infant, take care of him or her as carefully as you would an infant.

TOYS FOR HITTING. Oooh, our favorites. Striking toys can be found in the supermarket, the hardware store, the stationery store, antique stores, tack shops – even, if you're feeling perverse, leather stores.

A common way of describing the sensation of a toy is to talk about “thud” and “sting” – most bottoms prefer one or the other. The sting-to-thud ratio of any striking toy depends mostly on its proportion of weight to breadth. You can learn this particular bottom's preference either by asking, or by trying a bit of each and watching her reaction.

With striking toys, like any other toy, it's very important to start slow and work your way up. While a few bottoms enjoy the challenge of fast buildup or even no warmup at all, they're the exception – and any bottom can go a lot further if properly warmed up.

Things that are basically broad, stiff and flat fall under the general subcategory of “paddles.” Paddles are most often made of leather, which is relatively flexible and stingy, or of wood, which is stiff and more thuddy. Hairbrushes and wooden spoons, traditional spanking implements, are basically small paddles and are actually quite harsh, beyond many folks' limits. If you prowl antique stores you can sometimes find old fraternity paddles, which are vicious, or novelty paddles with corny sayings on them, which are embarrassing. Make sure your paddle has no harsh

edges or corners which can cut or abrade. Paddles with holes are hot to look at and hurt a lot, but are far more likely to break or blister skin than smooth paddles.

Long flat flexible striking toys fall under the broad category of “straps.” It’s relatively easy to find good straps outside leather stores – an old, soft, well-worn, broad leather belt from the ’60s is a thrift store treasure. Tack shops and antique stores (watch for leather razor strops in good condition) are also good places to find straps. The sound of a top pulling her belt out of its loops and doubling it up is delightfully scary. But be extra-cautious in negotiating play with straps – they are commonly used by abusive parents and spouses, and are thus likelier than most other toys to trigger flashbacks to nonconsensual violence.

You’ll hear multi-tailed toys called “cats,” “cat-o-nine-tails,” “flails” and other names; we’ll call them, generically, “floggers.” Floggers may have just a few tails (if there are only two, they’re usually called “quirts”) or hundreds. They are most commonly made of leather, but we’ve seen nice ones made of rope, rubber and manmade materials as well. Braided tails are nasty, tails with knots nastier yet. Some floggers are made of the gentlest, most sensual suede or deerskin, others of tough harsh hide. Try a potential flogger on yourself – or, better yet, have a trusted friend give you some strokes with it – before you buy it if possible, and certainly before you use it on somebody else.

Long thin stiff rods fall under the category of “canes.” Bottoms mostly either love canes fanatically or hate them passionately – they hurt a lot, and the pain comes in two waves, one when the cane strikes, and another a few moments later when the tissue decompresses. Classically, canes are made of rattan, often varnished. Rattan canes need to be soaked regularly to maintain their weight and flexibility – use salt water to avoid mildew. Rattan canes feel wonderful, but are hard to clean if they come in contact with blood, plasma or other body fluids –

so we also often see canes made of manmade materials like fiberglass and Delrin. Cane sluts (like us) like to have several of each kind, in various lengths, breadths, and flexibilities.

Bullwhips, blacksnakes and signal whips are called “single-tailed whips,” and are for use only by genuine experts. The “crack” these whips can make is actually the sound of the tip breaking the sound barrier – that’s how fast they travel, and how dangerous they can be. A single-tailed whip can tear flesh. If you haven’t practiced assiduously on inanimate objects for a long time, don’t even think about using one on a human being.

TOYS FOR PINCHING. While you can do perfectly wonderful S/M with nothing but a bag of wooden clothespins, players who love the slow buildup and cathartic release of wearing and removing clamps often collect many different kinds (one bottom we know has a box the size of a small suitcase that contains nothing but clips and clamps). The classic place to apply clamps is on the nipples, but a fair percentage of bottoms find that particular type of pain difficult to handle – others adore it, so you have to ask. Clamps also work well just about anywhere on the body where you can grab a pinch of skin and slip on a clamp. Occasionally a clamp gets put on a place that is truly intolerable, perhaps on top of a nerve; it is entirely reasonable for a bottom to ask to have such a clamp moved, maybe only half an inch or so. Some clamps, such as Japanese clovers, tighten when you pull on them. Others have teeth or ridges that bite. One thing that all clamps have in common is that they hurt the most coming off, and the longer they’ve been on, the more they hurt on removal – be prepared for a yelp or jump from your bottom. Plan your timing; clamp removal after orgasm is *much* harder to handle. If you’re being nice, remove the clamp gently and gradually... if you’re being mean (and if it’s not toothed or ridged), yank it off. You can also string several non-toothed clamps at intervals along

a cord so that you can yank them all off at once – this is called a “zipper,” and delivers a serious jolt of pain and a major flood of endorphins.

TOYS FOR POKING. Poky feelings may come from something sharp being pressed into the skin, or from something sharp actually being pressed *through* the skin.

If you don’t want to break skin, bamboo skewers (like for shish kabob) poke beautifully – a blindfolded bottom may think you’re piercing him (fun for mindfuck). A Wartenburg wheel, used by neurologists, is a small wheel with very sharp spokes on the end of a handle; you run it along the skin like a pizza cutter. Yeowch!

Play that actually breaks skin is to be done *only* by experienced tops or under the supervision of an experienced top. Play piercings, typically done with disposable hypodermic needles or sterilized acupuncture needles, involve inserting needles just below the surface of the skin and back out again – not for the permanent insertion of jewelry, but just for the sensation of being pierced. Cuttings, properly placed no deeper than a cat scratch, are usually done with a sterile scalpel. Some players rub ash or tattoo ink into a decorative cutting to make a permanent mark. There is no way to guarantee that a play piercing or cutting won’t scar, so be aware that it might and refrain from graffiti.

TOYS THAT HEAT OR COOL. Temperature offers a powerful range of sensations. We mentioned hot wax and ice cubes earlier, but they’re worth noting again here, since they’re such simple and versatile toys. A bottom may find it impossible to distinguish between extreme heat and extreme cold – we’ve heard of scenes in which a top convinces a blindfolded bottom that he’s about to be branded, then presses an ice cube into his flesh.

Some folks enjoy playing with “chemical heat” from spicy oils like cinnamon or peppermint, or from commercial concoctions like Ben Gay or Tiger Balm. It takes only a tiny bit of any of these to create a strong sensation, particularly on mucous membranes like cunts or assholes – start with the tiniest dab, and give the heat several minutes to build before you consider adding more. If you use too much and your bottom can’t handle it, apply a lot of anything oily – vaseline, cold cream, even vegetable oil or butter from the kitchen – to the affected area to dilute the chemical, then send your victim to the shower to suds it off with shampoo.

The ultimate temperature play is branding. Like piercing and cutting, branding is to be done only by very experienced tops. The way it’s done on TV westerns, or in “The Story of O,” does *not* work on people—hide the way it does on cowhide – learn from an expert before you even consider exploring branding. Brands nearly always leave scars.

TOYS THAT ZAP. Electricity play is a fairly specialized play style with some special risks. The impulses that tell your bottom’s heart when to beat are electrical, and you most definitely do not want to confuse those impulses – so a general rule for electricity play is “never above the waist.” We also think it’s better not to do electricity play with a bottom who has a heart condition, and to be extremely cautious about using it on or near piercings.

Within those rules, though, there is still room for fun. Many folks who like electricity use TENS (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation) devices, a medical gadget used to help relieve chronic pain, for sensations ranging from extremely mild through moderately strong. Some manufacturers have modified TENS units for scene play and created specialized attachments – butt plugs and cock rings and such – a big investment but very pleasant to play with. Relaxacisors (a quackish weight-loss gadget from

the '40s and '50s) deliver a stronger sensation. Tasers and cattle prods are extremely strong, too much so for most players – we don't recommend them unless your bottom is in good health and both of you have had lots of experience with less intense forms of electricity play.

A special case is the “violet wand” – another medical device, once thought to help with such problems as baldness. The violet wand delivers a different form of electricity that stays primarily on the surface of the skin, so it's the only electricity toy that's considered safe for use above the waist, although you should keep it away from the eyes. The sensation feels a bit like the shock you get from walking across a wool carpet and touching a doorknob, except it goes on and on and.... Again, a big investment, but the folks who love these *really* love them.

TOYS FOR TURNING ON AND GETTING OFF. While many people play without genital sex, we're strong advocates for having as much sex as possible – so our toy collections tend to include lots of gadgets for getting people aroused and giving them orgasms.

Dildoes and butt plugs give bottoms (and tops!) that wonderful filled-up feeling that makes orgasms so much more worthwhile. Assholes in particular do not take well to being harshly stretched – insert plugs and such only after plenty of preparatory finger play, v-e-r-y gradually and gently, and don't go for the Guinness book on plug size unless you know your bottom can handle it. Use lots and lots and lots and lots of lube (one top we know says “If there isn't lube dripping from the ceiling, you haven't used enough”). If anything burns or creates a sharp or tearing pain, stop immediately – either fix the situation that's causing the pain, or move on to another activity. Butt toys need to have a wide flange at the bottom so they don't get lost in

the rectum – a lost toy is at best uncomfortable and embarrassing, and at worst a serious emergency.

Vaginas are less picky about what gets inserted in them, although scrupulous cleanliness is essential for anything that goes into a vagina. Still, the sensation of being hurt or bumped deep inside is not erotic to most women. We suggest that if you like to play with dildoes and other insertables, you acquire a few different sizes and shapes, and keep track of which bottoms like which – or, better yet, encourage your bottoms to own their own dildoes that are exactly the size and shape they like, and that get used only on them.

Toys can give you genitals other than the ones nature gave you. If you have a vagina, you can strap on a penis, or insert one into yourself and still have one left over for a friend. If you want a bigger or harder penis, open the drawer and take one out. Ever wish you had a penis on your leg, or your face? Or that you could have two penises, one for each hole? Use your imagination – and your MasterCard.

Cocks like constriction. Those veins we see on the outside of a penis are the exit path for the blood that makes erections; the arteries that bring the blood in are buried deep inside. Many men find that when you constrict from the outside, with, for instance, a cock ring, or some bondage made with thin rope, or a few condoms, the amount of blood in the cock increases – and so does the erection. Some men also love the sensation of having their balls pulled away from the body, and tops who play with such men often stock special devices called “parachutes” and weights for this purpose – heavy brass bells are particularly charming, although Janet once improvised a ball weight from a tube sock and a jar of pennies. Although we lack the proper equipment to confirm these reports, we are told such activities feel good. We are told this appreciatively. Enthusiastically. Loudly.

●wn lots of lube. Yes, good water-based lube is expensive – but you paid more for that half-gallon of premium ice cream you polished off last week, and we bet you didn't enjoy it half as much. Lube is important for good sex and essential for good safer sex. Don't be stingy.

TOYS FOR ROLE-PLAYING. For tops and bottoms, every day can be Halloween. Role-playing doesn't have to involve specialized toys or costumes – imagination and creativity can certainly suffice – but we think half the fun of a role-playing scene is the trip to the thrift store beforehand. (Well, maybe a quarter of the fun.)

If you play with one role a lot, you may want to consider getting toys, props and costumes appropriate to that role. Daddies may wear big threatening leather belts. Bitch goddesses lace themselves into shiny tight corsets and spike-heeled shoes. Interrogators and rapists hide their features with masks or hoods. Pirates wear high boots and dashing shirts. Schoolmistresses have long frumpy skirts and high-necked blouses and whippy scary canes. If you like to train puppies, you'll need collars and bowls and rolled-up newspapers; if you prefer ponies, get some bridles and crops and maybe an insertable tail or two.

Your role-playing costumes and props serve a dual function: they help you and your bottoms get into the mood when you're actually playing, and they signal your particular role interest to potential bottoms. So get yourself over to the thrift store or costume shop and have fun!

TOYS FOR THE ROAD

Unless you're prepared to haul a steamer trunk along to every play date (and some tops do exactly that), you'll probably want to think about developing a portable toy kit.

Of course, “portable” is relative. Both of us usually use a softball bag from the sporting goods store for carrying our toys to parties and demonstrations. But we also like to be able to drop a few small toys into our purses, just in case.

One player we know uses a small zippered bag, about 8" x 10" x 3", for his portable toybag. It contains a couple of lengths of rope, a mini-whip made of four leather thongs folded in half and rubber-banded together at the fold (which can also be disassembled if he or his partner wants to use the thongs individually), and a few clothespins. Safer sex is taken care of with several latex gloves in his size, a few condoms and some individual-sized packets of lubricant. Emergency supplies include a small flashlight and a pair of paramedic's shears. There's still plenty of room left over for whatever specialized small equipment he wants for any particular session – a lightweight collar, a small tube of hot cream, a mini-vibrator, a cock ring or whatever.

If you're traveling by air – and especially through customs – you'll have to do some serious thinking about what to take with you. For domestic travel, bags that get checked through as luggage aren't usually inspected closely, although these days random searches are much more common than they were when we wrote the first edition of this book. If you carry your bag onto the plane, it *will* be inspected – if you're carrying anything they think is dangerous, which typically includes all sharp objects, heavy striking objects like clubs and chains, and many whips, they'll take it away from you and you won't get it back. We suggest either checking your toys or having a freight service ship them ahead of you.

Customs agents for overseas travel may be very cool about your toys – or not. We've heard some scary stories. If you're traveling to a very conservative or sex-negative country, we think you should probably stick to toys that have real-world uses: clothesline, clothespins, hairbrushes, belts, candles and so on.

Consider shipping any toys you buy overseas home separately. On the other hand, on her first trip to Germany Dossie packed no toys and no studded clothes, only to discover a leather store right in the Frankfurt airport. If you have a friendly travel agent, she may be able to advise you further about whether you're likely to get hassled.

MAINTAINING TOYS

Well-maintained toys are clean, free of breakage or flaws, and a joy to use. Poorly maintained toys can cause injury and spread disease, and signal to the world that you're a sloppy top who doesn't care about your bottoms. You wouldn't go to a play date with dirty hair and smelly armpits; your toys deserve at least as much attention as your body does.

Any toy that you suspect has come into contact with body fluids needs to be cleaned – and if you're not positive that it hasn't, clean it again. Rubber toys, metal toys and toys of manmade materials like silicone and plastic can be lightly handwashed using a cleanser like Hibiclens and warm water, then soaked for half an hour in a solution of one part household chlorine bleach to nine parts water. Leather toys should be cleaned using leather cleaner, left to air-dry for at least a day, then reconditioned, before being used on another bottom. The exact technique will depend on the type of leather; you can check with the store or craftsperson that sold it to you. Toys made of plant materials like rattan and wood should be varnished if they are likely to come into contact with various bottoms' body fluids. If such a toy gets fluids on it, clean it thoroughly with nonoxynol-9-containing toy cleanser, or with soap and water and then a liberal wipe of hydrogen peroxide. I, then rinse thoroughly (some people have sensitive skins that may be irritated by such chemicals). If you suspect that the fluids may have gotten

under the varnish, sand the varnish off, do the soap-water-peroxide thing, let it dry thoroughly, then re-varnish it. It's a good idea to let any toy that is difficult to clean dry thoroughly, in the sunlight if possible, for a few weeks before using it on a different person.

Inspect all your toys frequently for cracks, weak spots, raveled stitching, etc. If you find a problem, fix it promptly, and if you don't have time right then, set the toy aside where it can't possibly get mixed up with the toys you might use. If a toy can't be repaired, discard it.

Play-test bondage equipment and eyebolts periodically by having someone heavy try them out. If something seems creaky or wobbly, fix it before you play with it again.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS ON TOYS

As the old saying goes, "Size doesn't matter" – toybag size, that is. No knowledgeable bottom judges a top on how many toys he has. Tops get judged on their skill, creativity, character and ethics, not on their stuff.

If you're a "gear queer" who enjoys collecting dozens or hundreds of cool toys, and you're not bankrupting yourself to do it, we applaud you – we love beautiful toys, own a lot ourselves, and have friends whose collections are practically museum-quality. You're also helping to keep our leatherworker friends, a vital link in the community, busy creating instruments of joy. But don't forget: your partner is bottoming to you, not your toys... and that's exactly the way you want it, right?

interlude 4

A first-time topping scene played by a bottom and her friends.

This scene happened not long after I came out into S/M. I had broken up with my first S/M partner, Rick, a few months previously, and with great care and some trepidation, we had recently resumed our play relationship, with no intention of becoming partners again. Our preferred roles in scene, he the ravishing top, me the helpless bottom, fit together just about perfectly, and indeed, after this story we continued to play as friends for another nine years.

At that time I was also playing with a professional dominatrix named Celia, an intimidating relationship for me, since she had so much more experience and seemed so free and confident in her S/M. I was quite overawed.

One afternoon the three of us got together to videotape a discussion of S/M that we hoped would be useful information for people who didn't understand our sexual practices. After a few hours of talking about sex and play, the erotic tension began to mount and it became clear that all three of us wanted to play together.

You would think that a greedy girl like me would be a happy little piglet at the thought of bottoming to both of my tops, but in fact I was terrified. The emotional connections between the three of us were complicated and tender, and I could not figure out how this scene would work.

We went out for dinner, and it was there that a new vision came to me, a desire I had never before felt. I started topping both of them. Fussed over how they lit my cigarettes, felt them up under the table, sent Rick to the bathroom with a conspicuous erection. The restaurant was in the gay part of town, and the waiters understood perfectly well what was going on, and indeed, helped out by exaggerating the formality of the service and waiting patiently while Celia made sure my plate was perfectly arranged, while she pretended she was not affected by my foot exploring her crotch, again under the table. Both she and Rick were startled but eager to encourage my new behavior. I felt excited and curiously confident, as if I had entered a trance in which it was clear that nothing could go wrong.

During dinner Rick and Celia, amazed, stayed very quiet. I kept the conversation going by asking intrusive questions: "How does your cunt feel right now?" "Is your ass clean for me?" This is my rude and toppish version of negotiation: I make threats, the bottom(s) indicate acquiescence or limits in their responses. For instance: "My cunt is throbbing and eager for you, Ma'am." "My asshole is a little sore from last night, I might have to offer it slowly and carefully."

Back at Celia's place, the toys were all still spread out for the show and tell part of our video. We had been talking about them all afternoon, so I had a good idea of what might interest either of them, and where limits might be found. I made them take each other's clothes off – slowly. I interrupted from time to time to slow them down even further, instructing them to get each other as turned on as they could while each article of clothing was removed.

Then I had Celia remove my panties, again slowly and sensuously, very seductive on her knees in front of me. I had to punish her for getting too eager about sniffing my cunt, slapping her upturned face while she promised to behave herself. I told her to do nothing she was not told to do.

I sent her off to the kitchen for refreshments while I had Rick clear the bed and lay the toys out as I liked them. Celia served tea very prettily, on her knees, careful to give me just the right amount of sugar and cream.

Rick was endowed with a dick as big around as my wrist, and long enough to make taking all of it in somewhat of a challenge. He also needed to fuck quite vigorously for a long time to get off. (It's a very good thing that we like challenges.) So the meat of the scene, if you'll pardon the expression, consisted of me ordering Rick to fuck Celia, with me counting cadence, ordering them to follow my rhythm, and turning them over and over so I could flog first one exposed ass and then the other. Later Celia told me she felt as if I was fucking her, and beating her, with Rick's huge cock. That archaic word from Victorian porn, "bludgeon," constitutes an perfect description of the nature of the scene.

How did I feel? Triumphant. I hadn't known I had that in me. I felt powerful and sexy and on top of the world, or at least on top of my two lovers. And I felt a fulfillment of another part of myself, grateful to discover that I could top. I could do it myself, no longer totally dependent on the energy of someone else, no longer waiting impatiently for somebody else to manifest some desire, I could make a scene happen myself. Power! Freedom!

Although my primary role in S/M continues to be the hapless bottom, wickedly tormented, I have never given up topping. And never will.

12

FINDING OTHERS

FIRST THINGS FIRST. Many tops make what we think is a big mistake – they set out looking for bottoms, maybe only for bottoms of a particular type.

Why is that a mistake, you ask? Well, because it takes a lot more than a bottom to be a top. It takes a set of techniques that will enable you to do what you do with skill and confidence. It takes a sense of the many ways BDSM can work out in real life, as opposed to the ideas you've probably encountered in fiction and videos. And it takes the support of a network of more experienced tops, bottoms and switches to introduce you around, help you when you encounter difficulties, and coach you on the etiquette and customs of this strange new environment. In other words, it takes a community. So when you attend your first munch or club meeting, tear your eyes away from the people who look like potential play partners, and start looking around for people who look like the kind of top you want to be, because those are the people who can help you become that kind of top.

VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES. Since we wrote the first edition of this book, the Internet has become the main venue in which players from around the world can meet, flirt, make friends, exchange ideas and become part of one another's lives.

If you're reading this, it's a pretty safe bet that you've already spent a bit of time on the 'Net – these days it's the first exposure many people get to the world of kink. But if you haven't, allow us to recommend that you do so immediately; if you can't afford your own computer, you can arrange to use one in a café or library. Being 'Net-illiterate in this day and age could cost you knowledge, social opportunities and quite possibly partners.

Whether you decide to explore websites, newsgroups, chatrooms, and/or private mailing lists – all of which we discussed in some detail in *The New Bottoming Book* – keep in mind that the virtual BDSM world has its good points *and* its bad points. On-line interaction is a relatively low-risk way to exchange ideas, learn new philosophies and techniques, discuss issues, ask for help with problems, experiment with different personae, and flirt with anyone who's willing to flirt back. If you use one of the Internet providers that allows you to have one or more “screen names,” it's very difficult, often impossible, for anyone to find out your real identity... so if you feel too scared or shy or vulnerable to attend a real-world function, on-line interactions can be your lifeline to the kink world.

On the other hand, that very anonymity enables some people to feel less accountable for what they say or do. They can pretend to be someone they're not, since you'll have no way to find out otherwise. They can insult (“flame”) you, spread rumors about you, cyber-stalk you, or promise things they have no intention of delivering.

Some people feel that the 'Net is a safer way to interact than real life (or “meat life,” as 'Netfolk call it). In some ways it

is – it's rare to come away from a chatroom with bruises or sprains. But the emotions generated by Internet debates and by fantasy play in chatrooms can be quite real and powerful; we've both known people badly hurt by virtual interactions gone wrong.

So consider this section a *caveat emptor* regarding the Internet. Use it, explore it, learn from it – but always remember that you have no way of knowing whether the person you're talking to has your best interests at heart. We love the 'Net – well, one of us does, anyway – but we see it as a supplement to, not a substitute for, real-world interaction.

MUNCHES. Munches were developed as a venue in which people who had met on the 'Net could get together to meet one another face-to-face; since then, they've grown into one of the most widespread phenomena in the kink community. A munch is an event in which kinkyfolk can meet in a non-kink space – typically a restaurant, food court or bar – to socialize, flirt, cruise and generally hang out. They're usually less threatening for newcomers than parties or support groups, since most people wear street clothes and no serious play takes place. Here in the Bay Area, it's possible to go to a munch almost every night of the week, and even the smallest towns these days usually have at least a monthly munch. And where do you learn about them? On the Internet, of course.

LEATHER BARS. For many decades, the primary venue for kinky gay men to form community and to look for partners has been the leather bar. These venerable institutions usually feature a fairly conventional bar space in front, and often have some sort of small play space in back.

More recently, lesbians, bisexuals and heterosexuals are finding increasing welcomes in leather bars (but check with your gay men friends about the vibe in any particular bar if you're not positive that you're welcome there). Many leather bars also help

form community by sponsoring fund-raising events such as leather competitions and beer bashes to raise money for local charities.

SUPPORT GROUPS. If you can, we strongly recommend that you join your local BDSM club. Many large urban communities have several clubs of different orientations (gay, lesbian, het, bi, male-top, female-top, pansexual and so on); pick one or several that suit your orientation. If the only one you can find doesn't fit you, get in touch with them and ask them what else is out there. If you're feeling shy and having a hard time making connections, offer to do some volunteer work: get out a mailing or work the door at an event. You'll meet lots of people, and help build support for people who are newer and scarer than you.

If you don't have a local club, join one of the big urban ones (at least that way you'll get to read the newsletter, and perhaps to attend an event or two during vacation time), or start your own.

If you think you are too shy to go to a support group, allow us to reassure you. Such meetings are nowhere near as threatening as you may imagine. The first Society of Janus meetings Dossie attended were held in the basement of a church: how wholesome. People at support group meetings are generally friendly and straightforward, not likely to come on with a lot of attitude or deeply in role, and what cruising there is is customarily civilized and respectful. Confidentiality is paramount – nobody is going to call up your boss or spouse and reveal your secret life, and if you run into someone from the office at the meeting... well, what is *he* doing there? And if your fantasy embarrasses you so much that you cannot imagine getting together in a room with other people who also have fantasies, remember that none of them can read your mind – so your privacy is ensured anyway.

THE KINK COMMUNITIES AND PEOPLE OF COLOR.

Our communities are places of refuge, often the only place in our lives where we can be ourselves without shocking or enraging the people around us. We need that sense of safety, and we rely on cultural recognition signals – shared concepts, language, body language – to feel secure that we are at home among our tribe. Our community is our wildlife sanctuary where we are safe to live our wildness.

Similarly, many people – who for a variety of reasons constitute oppressed minorities within the predominant culture – have too often experienced being misread, misjudged and mistreated for being different. They rely on their own communities for a place of refuge, where it is okay to be who they are. This is particularly important for people of color, whose “difference” is inexorably visible. Several people of color told us that their first impression of the BDSM community was: “There’s nobody here who looks like me.”

Sadly, since most cultures are not accepting of our sexual lifestyles, people of color often enter the kink community at the expense of their membership in their original place of refuge, the community of people-who-look-like-me.

So how can we make our wildlife sanctuary a place of refuge for everybody? Most BDSM communities are predominantly white, middle-class, relatively well educated. This poses a problem for anyone else who wants to join.

It’s not enough for white people to say “Hey, I’m not a racist, you can trust me.” It’s going to take a much more interactive process to truly integrate our communities. Just recently, we have been hearing from people of color who have come together to open up the discussion of race and community. This is an extremely sensitive topic, and conversations tend to get heated, so perhaps the first thing to understand about doing this work is that we all have to be willing to feel uncomfortable. We are, after

all, attempting to connect in an intimate environment under the weight of centuries of brutal oppression.

What people of color tell us is that white people need to raise their awareness of the racism that permeates our society. It is not enough to simply assume that people of color will automatically think themselves privileged to be allowed into eurocentrist environments. We all need to make room for cultural difference in our communities, for different ways of communicating, of making connection, of dealing with feelings, of generating family. That's what cultural difference is, a huge repertoire of ways of doing everything, and that is the richness that cultural diversity can bring to all of us. People of European ancestry need to be willing to get changed a little, to expand their vision, to allow difference to have an impact on them.

In preparing to write this, we spoke with a number of people of color who are creating this dialogue, and this is what they wish white people would *not* do. Watch out for being excessively polite: overwhelming welcome tends to be accompanied with nervous laughter, and nobody feels comfortable. Don't talk down, don't assume that just because a person is not white he is illiterate.

Hate words are not good jokes. White people may feel safe enough to laugh at ethnic slurs, but living as a racial minority in a white culture is far more dangerous.

Beware stereotyping... especially stereotypes that turn you on. Approaching someone because you have always wanted to play with, for instance, a submissive Asian woman or a hypersexual black man, is objectifying and objectionable to the person being stereotyped. Being welcomed as an exotic is not the same as being welcomed as a person.

As marginalized outsiders, we kinksters have experience and knowledge that is unknown to those who are not sexual adventurers. Similarly, people who are marginalized, made outsiders, for reasons of racial or ethnic difference, have special

and valuable wisdom. White people, in learning to listen to an outsider's perspective, gain opportunities to see themselves in new mirrors. The reflection may be difficult to look at, perhaps not flattering, and often colored with the justified anger of the oppressed. And when we hold still and listen to the wisdom of people whose experience is different from ours, then we can start to change things.

And then we all win.

OK, BUT WHERE ARE ALL THE BOTTOMS?

If you ask a bunch of bottoms, you will hear heartfelt and often bitter complaints about the scarcity of tops in the kink community. The good news (if you're a top) is that this is often true – particularly in heterosexual communities or those in smaller cities and rural environments. The other good news is that it's changing: both of us have noticed that more and more of the new young players coming into the scene are top-identified.

However, for the time being, there are more bottoms than tops – often many more. Dossie remembers learning to top because in the women's community in which she came of age as a player, there essentially were no tops, so bottoms politely took turns topping one another so that everybody got to get played with. What that means to you, particularly if you're a heterosexual female, a lesbian or a gay man, is that you as a top are in something of a buyer's market.

That certainly doesn't mean, however, that all you have to do is lean back and casually choose from a parade of eager bottoms who are all dying to throw themselves at your feet. Quality tops get quality bottoms – it's up to you, not only to be a quality top, but to make sure your potential bottoms know it. This goal is not accomplished by boasting about your true master- or mistress-hood, or by acting pushy and bossy outside scene space in order

to demonstrate your natural gift for domination, or by hauling around a bunch of toys that you had to take out a second mortgage to buy. The best tops we know are quite modest, often soft-spoken, and always scrupulously polite – until they’ve finished their negotiations and the scene begins... then, watch out!

So, you ask, how do I let the world know of my wonderful toppiness without coming off like a cross between P.T. Barnum and Attila the Hun? The first suggestion we can make is that you learn as much as you possibly can, and never stop learning. Take classes. Read everything you can get your hands on (remembering, of course, to distinguish between fantasy/fiction and reality). Practice, practice, practice – if not on an eager subject, then on an inanimate object like a pillow or teddy bear, or on yourself.

IT PAYS TO ADVERTISE. When you’re searching for play partners or life partners, what you are doing is marketing – and if you think it’s beneath your toppish dignity to market yourself, we hope you and your dignity have many happy nights together.

The first step in marketing a product is, of course, to make sure that the product is marketable. Are you technically skilled? Are you responsible? Are you flexible? Are you empathetic? Do you take good care of your physical and emotional health? If you didn’t answer all of these questions with an emphatic “yes,” we suggest you do some close self-examination and self-improvement: all the marketing in the world won’t move a product that people don’t want.

Next, take a look at your packaging. While it’s not necessary to wrap yourself in custom leather from head to toe, a little toppish accessorizing helps catch bottoms’ attention. Gay men and lesbians can use hanky and key codes as shorthand to communicate their orientations and interests, which is convenient; unfortunately, these signifiers haven’t worked their way very far into the het community just yet. Since many male bottoms are also fetishists,

the wearing of fetish apparel – tall boots, tight corsets, leather or rubber or PVC – is convenient code by which het female tops can communicate their interests. Heterosexual male tops can run into problems – if they look too fetish-y, women may assume they are gay and discount them as possible play partners. Still, a leather vest over a handsome silk shirt or turtleneck sweater, possibly paired with leather pants, a “significant-looking” leather belt or a small whip worn on the left side, and/or a handsome pair of shiny boots, will get your message across. Various kinds of drag – schoolmaster or -mistress, pirate, cowboy, cop – will, of course, get attention from devotees of all genders and orientations.

GET THE WORD OUT. Techniques used by vanilla people for partner-finding – personal ads in print media, voice mail, or on the Internet or computer bulletin boards – can also be used to good advantage by kinky folk. Some of these venues may not allow overtly kinky ads, but a little clever indirectness can usually get your point across: words like “take-charge,” “stern,” “bossy” and so on, or references to favorite works of literature, are common routes. Some newspapers, deplorably, charge more for kinky ads than for vanilla ones. We suggest that you protest these policies when you find them, but if they’re the only game in town, well, it’s better to get the word out via a discriminatory newspaper than not to get the word out at all.

The trick to writing a good personal ad is to be as clear and specific as possible about your toppy interests while still communicating a good sense of what you’re like as a person. This is true whether you’re placing your own ad or responding to someone else’s. We recommend that you do both.

One friend of ours says “The ideal personal ad gets exactly one response – the right one.”

TO CRUISE OR NOT TO CRUISE? We think singles-bar-type cruising – walking up to total strangers and asking “So, wanna

get whipped?” – is probably not an optimal strategy for you, unless you’re very gorgeous or very self-assured. (However, neither of us has ever been bold enough to try it, so we don’t know for sure.)

If you try thinking of an S/M event as more like a cocktail party than a singles bar, though, your chances will go up. One of the more successful cruisers we know says he has a seldom-fail opening line: “Hi, I’m Mike.”

While some bottoms choose tops who are bossy, pushy and overbearing, we believe that such bottoms are likely to have trouble separating their fantasies from their realities – not a good formula for a future of safe, life-enhancing play together. The bottoms we suggest you play with are the ones you connect with at a personal level – the folks with whom you “click” in terms of personality, intelligence and chemistry. And the best way to find out if that “click” is going to happen is to simply be yourself – personable, honest and interesting to talk to. If you do this right, there will be plenty of time to be mean, harsh and overbearing later, after the scene has begun.

The art of cruising comes at the moment when this friendly get-acquainted chatter turns to matters more personal. If you’re at a kink event, this isn’t too difficult: simply ask “So, what kinds of play do you enjoy?” and begin discovering whether the two of you have enough in common for further discussion. We suggest, that you not set your heart on play that very evening. If you can get your potential bottom’s phone number, or a date for coffee or a meal at some other time, that will give you more opportunity to get to know her, and will probably lead to better play later. On the other hand, if you’re both interested in playing right then and there, and your negotiations show no deal-breakers, then why not?

If you’re at an event that is sexual but not specifically S/M in nature, we suggest you stay specific about the kinds of activities

that interest you – “I’m into S/M” is a turnoff to a lot of people who have mistaken ideas about what that means, but “I enjoy bondage” or “I’ve had fun spanking some of my partners” might pique someone’s interest.

If you’re at a nonsexual event, you have to be even more indirect. A mild, flirtatious joke about “Oooh, you naughty boy” or “How come there’s never a slave around when you want one?” or “She was all tied up that day... and I couldn’t find the time to untie her” will give you some information about your potential partner’s interests. If she flirts back, you can take the conversation onto a slightly more direct level, although we still suggest you avoid words like “BDSM,” “dominance,” “submission” and “pain” until communication is established.

INTRODUCING BDSM INTO AN EXISTING RELATIONSHIP

These tips are all very well for all those single tops out there, you say. But what if you’re already happily coupled, and hoping to introduce your partner to the delights that lie within your delightfully toppish hands?

“So, honey, whaddaya say tonight I tie you up and flog you within an inch of your life?” is probably not a good start. Keep in mind that most people have a very inaccurate view of what BDSM and its practitioners are all about. Thus, you might do better to open the discussion by talking about a specific and not-too-scary activity that interests you – a little light bondage, some mild role-playing or a bit of sensuous spanking are often good places to start. Some couples enjoy reading erotica aloud to one another as a way to get turned on, and explore actual play later as it starts to feel safe.

He may surprise you by greeting your proposal with enthusiasm. Or he may have some concerns, which it’s important that you talk through. Often, first-timers are more comfortable

topping, not bottoming. You should probably go along with this plan if at all possible. Once he sees that what you have in mind is safe, exciting and fun, he may be more open to being on the receiving end.

Our book, *When Someone You Love Is Kinky*, was designed to be read by people who don't see themselves as being into kink, and might be useful for the two of you to read together. Or maybe you could go together to a program put on by your local BDSM club.

If he says "Absolutely not!" you're kind of stuck. Let's face it, some people are just vanilla. If your partner turns out to be one of these, there's not much point in nagging: you will have to choose between opening up your relationship (which we encourage you to do honestly and consensually), giving up your interest in kink, or giving up your partner. One of us has had to do the latter, and it is a sad and difficult decision which we hope you never have to make.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT BOTTOM

We know tops who have found lifelong joy, connection and pleasure with the right bottom – and tops who have been plunged into nightmares of guilt, self-doubt and depression by the wrong one. We want you to be in the first group. So what characteristics should you look for in a bottom? We think these are important:

- *Responsibility for one's own actions.* A bottom who blames you when anything goes wrong... or the obverse, a bottom who expects you to control all aspects of your scene, without any input or feedback... is not taking the proper amount of responsibility for his or her own actions. We know one bottom who, during his pre-scene negotiations, tells his tops, "I

want you to know that I'm doing this scene with you because I want to, and because I trust you to take good care of me. If anything goes wrong, we'll work it out together; I won't lay it all on you." Not surprisingly, this bottom finds lots of play partners.

- *Ability to give as well as take.* Sometimes "do-me queens" don't give energy back simply because they don't know how to – that problem is easily fixed by telling them. But others feel entitled to simply lie back and get done, without any desire to make sure that your needs get met. If you feel that your bottom falls into the latter category, it's time for some serious renegotiation before you burn out badly.
- *Discretion.* It's always tempting to enjoy hearing gossip about your fellow players – but if you hear a bottom spreading bad rumors about his or her previous tops, you might want to ask yourself what she will say about *you* if the relationship ends. Watch out especially for the bottom who has nothing good to say about *any* of her former play partners.
- *Self-control.* A bottom with a reputation for bad-temperedness or intoxication is probably not a safe choice of play partner. Remember, sooner or later you have to untie 'em.
- *Supportiveness.* Most bottoms will support you enthusiastically while you're acting like a top, especially if you're acting like the kind of top they like. But a good bottom will also be supportive when you're not acting like a top – when you're feeling tired, vulnerable, confused, depressed or simply untappy. Just as it's not much fun to be someone's "sex object" or "money object," it's hurtful to be thought of as a

“pain object” or “domination object.” As Janet says,
“a top is more than life support system for a whip.”

All of this – looking for and finding the right bottom – probably sounds like a lot of work. But we assure you, when she is looking up at you with that marvelous combination of fear, awe and love, all the work and struggle will recede into nothingness, and your bottom-finding time and energy will seem like the best investment you ever made.

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SPECIAL CASES

NOVICES. Do you want to bring out BDSM virgins? Topping a player who has little or no experience requires special care and commitment, and extra responsibility. The rewards are clear – a first-time fulfillment of years of fantasy can be incredibly exciting for both parties, hot stuff with heady feelings of conquest of the unthinkable. If the scene comes off well, your bottom will remember you with fond feelings forever, and you will feel like Santa Claus.

On the other hand, most often the first time we try anything, we don't do it as well as we will when we've had some opportunities to practice – so the first scene is often anticlimactic. Novice bottoms often have extreme fantasies but find that the realities are much harder to deal with than they thought, so be prepared to stop much sooner than you'd anticipated. Remember that the first time is probably not the last time... there's tons of stuff to learn to pull off your favorite fantasy, and you get all the tries you want to learn.

What knowledge do you need to top an inexperienced bottom? If you are a novice top, and your bottom is also a novice, then go very, very slowly. You will both make lots of mistakes, and if you can accept that, you will learn from them. If you are the more experienced player, then remember that virgin bottoms will not know much about their limits, and will not know the consequences of various types of play. Dossie recalls:

I once topped a novice bottom at a party, a sweet young thing all done up in white lace, eagerly waiting to be decimated. I started slow, but this bottom liked the feel of it and worked all the way up to a heavy caning by the end of the scene. Afterward, it became apparent that she did not know that she would have bruises from such a caning, and that she had a vanilla lover at home – I will never forget to ask about marks again! I took care to drive her home, and call the next day to make sure she was all right – she was, thank goodness.

So when you top a novice bottom, be sure to ask lots of questions, so you will have the opportunity to fill in the bottom's information about what to expect. Many first scenes are, rightly, very lightweight – it is inappropriate to push limits hard when you are topping a novice. Rather, you should be prepared to be very supportive, and share in the excitement of doing something that is new for the bottom, even if you've done it before. After all, good play is not judged by how heavy it is, but rather by how wonderful it feels.

Other bottoms may go so far out in a first scene as to push the limits of experienced tops (never underestimate the power of endorphins). A friend of ours describes a scene in which he was asked to top a novice whose stated purpose was to satisfy her intellectual curiosity about S/M so she could write about it.

Our friend started out cautiously, but the bottom turned out to have an enormous pain tolerance, so soon she was wearing sixteen small but very intense clamps on her skin, and liking it a lot, and the top was starting to feel like *his* limits were being pushed. He removed the clamps, and spent half an hour doing various other things. Toward the end, she was kneeling at his feet and he saw a shadow pass over her face. He asked: "Is there something you want to tell me?" "Yes, Master," she replied. "You may speak." "Please, Sir, the clamp you left on my clit is beginning to hurt a little."

New players need and deserve a supportive environment in which to explore their desires and to learn how to bottom. Good tops honor and value the trust and hard work a new bottom offers to us when he struggles with a new sensation, or fulfills a role he has never played before. We can help by presenting new events one at a time, by giving novices plenty of opportunities to feel their way into an unfamiliar sensation or command, and by letting them find out what they like and don't like without fear of judgment or condemnation.

When we watch over our novice bottoms carefully, and treat them with responsibility and respect, we get to share in the great adventure of starting down the path of kinky exploration, and to witness the blossoming of many happy little sluts and slaves.

PROFESSIONAL DOMINATION

The world of professional domination is one of the highest accomplishments of the BDSM scene. A good professional dominant is a skilled and respected expert on many if not all forms of play. Many give their knowledge back to the community

by teaching classes or workshops, as well as being available for actual play in negotiated sessions.

The professional dominant's studio can be an amazing site to behold. Entire houses may be full of rooms decorated and furnished to satisfy every fantasy, with much of the furniture offering practical applications for play: racks for bondage, horses for bend-over beatings, overhead winches to support the standing bottom for a flogging, specially designed bondage tables for the most complete immobilization. Many professional studios include rooms for different fantasies: the dungeon, all black and chains... the nursery for big babies, with lots of flannel and extra-large teddy bears... transformation rooms, with costumes, wigs and makeup to turn the bottom into the creature of his or her fantasy... white rooms with examining tables for playing Doctor Doom or Nurse Nasty.

Paying for the opportunity to play with such an expert is considered completely acceptable by S/M community standards. A person may want to see a professional because he wants to learn from an expert – a top who is somewhat uncomfortable with bottoming but wants to learn from that experience can often arrange a scene with a professional that includes exactly what he wants in a confidential environment. A bottom may go to a professional dominant for elaborate scenes that he can't get from his partner. A bottom who loves his wife and kids, their house in the suburbs and his standing in a straight community can visit a professional occasionally without giving up the rest of his life. And money is a fair and clean exchange for fantasy play sculpted by an expert to the bottom's needs, even when the bottom needs to serve. Some professionals also offer submissives, or switch themselves, for carefully negotiated and limited scenes with customers they trust (for obvious reasons of safety, there are few professional bottoms advertising in the open market).

A competent professional dominant is good at limits and boundaries. She will know which fantasies are workable in a professional relationship and which are not. It is traditional in professional scenes to include a lot of extremely wild S/M and to exclude actual sex, partly because that may fit better for the professional, and mostly because the exchange of sex for money is illegal in most states.

If you would like to know more about the world of professional domination, we recommend the excellent and hilarious English film “Personal Services,” very loosely based on the career of British dominatrix Cynthia Payne, which includes wonderful depictions of parties and Christmas dinner at this house of pain.

PUBLIC PLAY

The play party has become a basic institution in many BDSM communities, so basic that we have been asked if a person can explore kink at all if she doesn't want to play in public. Of course you can play without going to play parties, and many do. But public play is very popular among S/M players, so if you have fantasies of large audiences applauding and cheering your amazing sexual feats, we have a party for you.

Play parties are usually held in a space designed for that purpose, possibly a dungeon in someone's home, or the studio of a professional dominant. Other party play spaces are maintained by support groups as a volunteer endeavor, and some people make a profession of running a party house. Some clubs in major cities are set up for public S/M play, some on one night a week, some all the time. A play party space usually will have one or more dungeons equipped with furniture – one or more slings, a St. Andrew's cross, medical examination tables, bondage tables,

overhead hoists, cages, and the like... occasionally even beds. Conversation in the play area is discouraged because it intrudes on the consciousness of the people who are playing.

Normally there is also a social area, where food and beverages are available, where people can meet and cruise and negotiate, or come down after a scene. Most party houses have a set of rules or guidelines printed up for you, covering their expectations about everything from safe sex to responsible voyeurism, and most have dungeon monitors on duty throughout that party so there is always someone who can answer your questions. Safety is a prominent concern – what a nightmare to have to call an ambulance in the middle of an S/M orgy!

The play party provides a safe opportunity to meet people, watch how they play, explore new partners and play in a playful environment, with not so much personal commitment beyond the moment. Some monogamous couples come to watch others, socialize and to play special scenes for public display – we like to watch these scenes because couples who have played together for a long time are often very good at it, and you can see the intimacy and profound connection. People who like to watch are asked to be responsible, and keep at a non-intrusive distance. We enjoy voyeurism a lot – we get the chance to learn from what other people do, and tons of ideas and how-tos to take back to our own play. The encouragement of an eager audience helps many people push their limits – be careful not to let the crowd's enthusiasm push you into doing something you'll regret later.

Seeing others play can also help us feel more okay about ourselves. Dossie says: "When I see someone very turned on, stark naked and thrashing and looking real good, and that person is not necessarily young or thin, then I start to realize that maybe I look good when I play even if I'm not built like a centerfold. And when I see other tops, taking their time, dealing with the

equipment and their bottoms, going through all the effort and technical work to get a scene off the ground, and then I see that scene flying into the stratosphere, that helps me not feel like an idiot when it takes me a little time to get a scene working.”

We believe that the deprivatization of sex is a radical political act. Hush-hush attitudes toward sex have generated a sick history of shame, embarrassment, guilt and self-loathing that have crippled many people – kept them from realizing their wonderful sexual selves and often decimated their entire sense of self-esteem. In BDSM in particular, coming out is often made difficult by feelings of shame and inadequacy, as well as the problem of acquiring the extensive technical information and experience that make a good top or bottom. All of these difficulties can be addressed at the play party, where the opportunity to share sex and S/M with others can be powerfully healing.

We also like the challenge of play parties. When we prepare a scene for a play party, we often put in extra effort to make something that will be powerful for us and attract an appreciative audience, and playing in public gives an edge to a scene that can help it go further, or higher, or wherever you want it to go.

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FULL-TIME D/S

Some players live in their scene roles all the time: Master or Mistress and slave, or Daddy and boy, Mommy and girl, Mistress and dog, houseboy or french maid. In some people's eyes, living full-time is the ultimate expression of kink, complete immersion in the fantasy, making the fantasy their total reality.

Sometimes elaborate families are formed, where a senior top's girl might have a slave of her own, and another human may be functioning as the dog. Players form these families according to their needs, and demonstrate a startling facility to adapt to changing conditions – there's no rule that says you can't make agreements to change roles in whatever way suits you. And for those who are successful, wonderfully fulfilling and creative lives can follow.

We would like to point out that living full-time in role is not the “gold standard” of BDSM. We see far too many players who feel that if they're not “24/7,” they're somehow wrong, or

not “real” dominants. If this doesn’t sound like the way you want to live, if BDSM is a more comfortable fit in your life when you keep it in scene and drop roles the rest of the time, don’t let anybody tell you that you’re in any way inferior. However, if full-time BDSM does feel like a good fit for you, we encourage you to try it – starting slowly with one or two types of relatively easy power exchange, and adding new aspects of the power relationship as the old ones become habitual.

If people owning slaves or otherwise involved in relationships with a declared power inequity push your buttons, please remember that these lifestyles were consciously chosen, which may put them a step ahead of traditional marriages and the power dynamics of traditional sex roles that most people don’t even think about. And role-bound relationships work well for a lot of people. Many people are relieved to have a clear idea about who is empowered to do, say or decide what, and many bottoms are quite content to let their masters or mistresses run the show.

FLUIDITY. We’ve been friends with many people in full-time dominant/submissive relationships. Our observation is that when we spend time with such people as friends, we rarely see them behaving in ways much different than any other couple: the day-to-day demands of running a life remain the same, and must be addressed by someone or other. And almost nobody can be in full control of everything at every waking moment – or would like to be. While the dominants in novels (and sometimes chatrooms) express their dominance nonstop, in reality this approach doesn’t often work out very well.

However, what we do see in successful D/S couples is a very strong ability to read each other’s signals and a very fluid approach to moving in and out of their dominant or submissive mindsets – so the couple who at one moment is discussing someone’s problems at work may at the next moment be in full

dominant/submissive mode, with the dominant in complete control and the submissive completely pliable to her will.

What kinds of signals do these people give each other to make such extraordinary transitions possible? Some might be consciously chosen, like using a particular name (“boy” or “girl,” for example) or a particular behavior (a submissive kneeling, a dominant placing her hand on the back of the submissive’s neck). Others are less conscious, more intuitive – a tone of voice, a shift in body language. Longtime D/S couples grow extremely skilled in reading such signals and responding to each other’s shifting needs and desires as the moment dictates.

ACTIVITIES AND BEHAVIORS. What kinds of things do full-time D/S couples do to manifest their way of being together? The list can vary from one couple to the next, of course. Some dominants like to control their submissive’s behaviors with a goal towards improving his life – making sure that he quits smoking or does the work he brought home for the night or gets his daily exercise. Others require that their submissive give them valuable service of some kind – maintaining the household, caring for the dominant’s body or possessions, or even managing or training other submissives. Still others enjoy training their submissives in postures, vocal mannerisms, forms of address or types of service that are particularly appealing to the dominant – for example, kneeling with the knees 14” apart, eyes down, back straight, while proffering a cup of coffee that’s exactly the right strength and temperature and contains the perfect amount of cream and sugar.

Lifestyle D/S-ers have generated many clever devices to keep the submissive enslaved when the dominant is not present. The submissive may wear a collar or other symbol.

You can padlock a chain around her waist, or give him instructions to go into the bathroom at work at two o'clock every day and masturbate for five minutes without coming, and so on...

WHAT'S IN IT FOR THE SUBMISSIVE? One submissive we know, who drove twice a week from her work as a housewife and mother to take care of her master's household, told us, "At home, I do the same things, and nobody notices. When I do them for my master, he notices them and appreciates them and gives me lots of positive feedback for doing them." So for at least some submissives, part of their pleasure comes from being noticed and appreciated for what they have to offer. The owner of such a slave told us, "She is the most precious thing I could possibly own, and I never forget that."

For others, the charge is just the opposite – being faceless, dehumanized, as much the dominant's possession as her furniture or toothbrush and hence unworthy of comment. For these, the ability to "turn off their brain" by becoming a pure instrument of the dominant's will can be both rewarding and sexy.

The fantasy may be that the dominant's will is paramount and that the submissive's needs don't matter – but in reality, a submissive whose basic needs aren't being met won't feel submissive for very long, and a dominant who's exerting her will over an unhappy submissive will find the experience hollow and frustrating. Thus, it's important that there be a good match between the dominant's style and the submissive's desires. Some dominants prefer to manage their submissive's behaviors very closely, giving orders for each behavior they want; these dominants may do best with submissives who prefer to be pliable and will-less while in their submissive space. Others want submissives who can anticipate and meet their needs, and these may do best with submissives whose charge comes from caretaking and appreciation.

CONTRACTS AND SYMBOLS. There are many ways to do full-time BDSM relationships, and one way that people get clear about what they are doing is to write a contract, often called a slave or ownership contract, in which the rights and responsibilities of both parties are spelled out.

Why a contract? You might think that when you own someone they just do what you want all the time. Well, there are always limits, and if your bottom's limits offend you, remember that you probably have limits of your own. For instance, when you own a slave, does that mean you have to be lean and mean and in top role twenty-four hours a day, or do you get to relax now and then? If you have a little boy or girl, do you have to get up in the middle of the night when your "baby" has bad dreams? Are you contracting to provide income for both of you, or who goes to work and how do they do it? Contracts also normally cover agreements about monogamy and nonmonogamy: are both parties monogamous? If not, what are their responsibilities to each other? Can the top give the slave away to someone else? Can the slave ask to be given to someone else?

Many "contracts" are simply props, documents designed to turn people on but not to convey much real information. The contracts we've seen that actually worked well as relationship blueprints are fairly detailed documents that spell out both the submissive's and the dominant's responsibilities toward the relationship. The contract may include any or all of the following:

- *The duration of the contract.* Many couples start with a relatively short contract – a few weeks or a month – then, as they learn more about one another's needs and limits, may adjust and extend the contract for longer periods of time.

- *Symbols.* If the relationship includes the use of symbols such as collars or rings, the contract may dictate when and how these are to be worn.
- *Obligations.* What kinds of service must the submissive agree to provide, and under what circumstances? In what ways does the dominant agree to take care of the submissive – financially, emotionally, physically? In what ways is the submissive expected to take care of himself? Is S/M play expected or optional? How about sex?
- *Ways to communicate.* If one or the other partner has something to say that cannot be said within the confines of their role, how and when can they communicate that? Will the partners set aside a certain time, place or medium in which “amnesty” applies and they can communicate clearly without reprisal? There are many creative ways to accomplish communication in role without resorting to manipulation. One Mistress of our acquaintance has her slave write a journal entry onto the computer every morning, with orders to include information about his state of well-being, his emotional reality and any problems he might be experiencing. She can then read what he wrote, and decide on her response, without breaking role unless she chooses to.

This is also the area in which you will discuss code words and safewords. While long-time D/S couples often find that they have come to read each other well enough that they no longer need safewords very often, we suggest keeping at least one safeword in place in case of genuine emergency – if you’ve never seen your submissive have a heart attack before, you

may have trouble figuring out that her gasps for breath aren't issuing from unbridled lust.

- *Agreements about sex and play with others.* The contract may include agreements about what kinds of activities may and may not take place outside the relationship, and under what circumstances – both for the dominant and for the submissive. One contract we've seen does not allow the submissive the freedom to come without the dominant's permission, but gives the submissive five "get out of jail free" cards each month, in which she has sexual liberty for a brief period of time. Contracts should also include clearly stated agreements about safer sex standards.
- *Disagreements.* If there's a serious and real problem between the dominant and the submissive, how will this be handled? Is there an outside person who both parties trust who can help listen and mediate any problems?

ABOUT COLLARS. For some people, a collar is at least as meaningful as a wedding ring; for others, it's simple decoration, no more meaningful than a necklace. We think it's safe to say that for most people in D/S relationships, the collar is a potent and meaningful symbol.

But what does it mean? That depends on your own desires and those of your submissive. Some dominants like to keep one or two "training collars" around to use during casual or short-term play, then buy a personal collar for a submissive when their relationship deepens and lengthens – it's not uncommon for a couple to celebrate the initiation of their contract with a collaring ceremony.

If you are contemplating giving someone a collar, we suggest the two of you have a long talk about what it signifies to each of

you – this isn't an area in which disagreements typically work out very well. Other good things to discuss are when the collar is and is not to be worn: some people who work in straight jobs have special collars which look like ordinary jewelry but have special significance to them and their dominants, and which can be worn to the office or to dinner at Mom's.

It's also a good idea to get clear on who owns the collar. While in ordinary vanilla etiquette, a gift belongs to the recipient, many dominants feel strongly that they own their submissive's collar, and that it should be returned when and if it is no longer in use. This won't typically be an issue as long as the two of you are together, but if the relationship ends, a misunderstanding on this subject can cause unnecessary hard feelings.

HOW DO YOU KEEP IT FRESH?

Both of us have seen more than a few lifestyle couples come to painful disagreements, sometimes even a complete parting of the ways, when the dominant loses interest in play or sex, and the submissive begins to feel burned out or exploited. This is a common enough pattern that we suggest you take steps to make sure it doesn't happen to you.

It's not a bad idea to include in your contract, if you have one, some provisions for how often play will happen in the relationship – and then stick to them. Obviously, we all go through periods when we're feeling sick, depressed or overworked, and it's reasonable to allow yourself some downtime in your contract. But if for some reason you're not feeling like playing at all, ask yourself why: are your needs not being adequately met? Is there something you're missing that your play should be providing and isn't? Or is something missing that can't be taken care of in play, that needs to be addressed by you and your partner dealing with each other as equals? If you're suppressing anger, frustration,

sadness or other difficult emotions, it's unlikely that you'll be up for frequent or hot play.

It can be difficult to view your submissive with the thrill of domly lust you felt when you first met him; after all, many of us love novelty. But lifestyle couples can benefit by the same advice often given to vanilla couples: treat each other the way you did when your relationship was new and passionate. When you're going to spend time with your submissive, be as present for him as you can: take time to prepare yourself physically and mentally so that you're as sexy and dominant as you know how to be. Touch each other often. Remember the things that made you think he was so hot in the first place. Think of new ways to express your feelings toward him, and that he can express his feelings toward you – after all, one of the perks of being a dominant is that you can demand what you want.

We observe that people who do well at lifestyle relationships usually have very clear boundaries, even if they don't call them that, and can readily describe how they know when they are in and out of role, or which roles, or how deeply. They tend to be good at signals, and slide in and out of role with facility. They have respect for everybody's roles, submissives and dominants alike, and take pride in playing their part well. The reward is the opportunity to delve into yourself with tremendous intensity and manifest your dominant persona in a very complete way – to be truly the master or mistress of your own domain.

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SHADOW PLAY: DARKSIDE S/M

WHAT IS IT? Shadow play is our name for scenes that delve into deep psychological territory. It is our understanding that all BDSM involves explorations of parts of ourselves that we may have previously been aware of only in deep shadow. As you learn your emotional limits, you may find yourself wanting to push those limits by deliberately setting up a scene to travel in forbidden territory. Such scenes may involve emotions like rage or misery that can cause dysfunction if allowed to run free in our real lives. Adopting parent/child roles is often deep play, as is playing out personal trauma like child abuse, molestation or rape. Some players may use a scene to explore historical social oppression, like slavery, witch-burnings, the Inquisition or the Holocaust.

Dossie had a powerful experience of reclaiming a piece of her history after the scene with Janet that we told you about before, where Dossie was a poor waif in a Victorian workhouse. She recalls:

Janet had cleverly gotten around my limit about playing with punishment by caning me “to show you what would happen if you ever did do something you shouldn’t.” My role required nothing of me but to whimper and be pathetic for about three hours, a feeling I found to be curiously luxurious. Wondering about this the next day brought to mind a time in my life when I really was pathetic – in my early twenties I had to leave a violent partner when I was pregnant, with just about no resources. I used to hang out at this ecumenical ministry in the Haight because they gave me free yogurt, which for a few weeks was my primary source of protein. I’m sure I looked pretty pathetic to them, but that’s not how I felt. I was furious at myself, blaming myself for having gotten into this situation in the first place, and I was ferociously determined to be strong enough to pull my life back together and raise my baby, which I did. I couldn’t afford to be pathetic back then. It took an S/M scene 25 years later to bring me to compassion for my younger self and become able to empathize with how pathetic my situation really was. The scene gave me permission to give myself comfort, which I found very healing. Now when I remember that time in my life I no longer feel ashamed.

The Shadow. Our experience in the aftermath of that scene, which we played while we were writing this book, also led us to coalesce a theory about how S/M works as a healthy drive toward healing and integrity. Carl Jung envisioned the human psyche kind of like this diagram, only more dynamic, of course. The *Conscious* mind is what we are familiar with: me at my computer,

you holding this book. The *Preconscious* is about what we are only partly, or perhaps occasionally aware of, like dreams, or fantasies, or long-ago fuzzy memories – images and ideas that come and go like the tide. The *Unconscious* mind is that reservoir of instincts, archetypes, primal process that shows up in our dreams and desires, but of which we are only indirectly aware. And Jung placed the spiritual sense, which he thought of as the *Collective Unconscious*, at the very bottom of that ocean.



He also posited a realm of the mind, sometimes conscious, often not, called the *Shadow*, drawn in this diagram like an iceberg floating on the sea. We all know that the part of the iceberg that we can see is only the smallest part. Jung thought the function of the Shadow was to shut away thoughts, memories and feelings that we had forbidden to consciousness for one reason or another. This forbidding happens not only in our individual histories, but in our family's notion of what is and is not okay to discuss or acknowledge, and in our social and cultural paradigms of the same. An example for many of us would be the taboo against talking about sex, or even being aware of sexual energy except under very restricted conditions.

Individually, we may banish memories of trauma, embarrassment, fear, awareness of the less acceptable parts of ourselves – needy, yearning, pushy, cruel. We may banish desires we have been taught are inappropriate. And we may banish feelings that have been so scary, or responded to in such a negative fashion, that we decided, perhaps when we were too small to be making adult sense, that we must never feel that particular way again. Forbidden emotions sent to the deep freeze commonly include pathos, anger, shame, terror, villainy and victimhood. Starting to sound familiar?

So our thesis is that it just might be that our kinky desires, the drives that lead us to enact our dark and dangerous fairy tales, may very well be the longing to reunite with a part of ourselves that we have lost in the Shadow. Perhaps we yearn to bring that part back into consciousness, in the validating presence of another who can mirror us, and in this terrible state find us desirable. As we eroticize these tales from our own deepest personal mythology, we inject our self-rejection with the healing energy of the life force, with Eros, and confirm our newly enlarged sense of self with the affirmation of orgasm. As we welcome back our own lost parts, we become more whole – increase our integrity – with the healing power of S/M.

PLAYING IN THE SHADOW. The charge that each of us as individuals may feel about a particular scenario is what makes it deep. Many of us play rape scenes, and more than a few of us have actually been raped, so for some a rape scene is very deep play, searching for understanding, catharsis, healing or resolution.

Play can be deep for the top or the bottom or both. If we reenact a scene of abuse, it is not only the bottom who may be playing deep. Survivors of child abuse frequently carry with them what they learned from the adults, engraved into their psyches as the internalized abuser. Tops may experience profound emotion in playing the role of molesting bully or punitive parent.

People are attracted to playing in their shadows because it is very hot, intriguing, sexy. Please don't think that we are robots doomed to reenact the dysfunctions of our childhoods over and over without release, but rather that we seek out opportunities to struggle with these conflicts so that we have a chance to make the story come out differently.

If we let these desires drive us without our awareness, they may manifest in destructive ways. This is why we may repeatedly pick the partner who makes us the craziest. Dossie used to express

this desire by hunting down rough trade in the streets of New York (she found lots of it, too); Janet used to have such a profound need to be needed that she drove herself and her partners crazy by insisting that they need her even when they didn't. We find it a lot safer and more constructive to play out our old tapes with full awareness, within the boundaries of a scene. We can relive our old dramas to our heart's content, only this time we control the outcome. In this lies empowerment, with great potential for healing and transformation.

PLAYING WITH CULTURAL TRAUMA

Some of us like to play with cultural trauma, take the scripts for our psychodrama from the horrors of humanity's more brutal histories: war, genocide, torture, enslavement. The Holocaust, African slavery, the Spanish Inquisition, the rape of Nanking. These scenes are more than merely hot. They can be a constructive way of dealing with a history of oppression of our ancestors, our class, our race – or, for that matter, a history of being the oppressor. More dirt to dig up from the Shadow and plow into fertilizer for new roses.

Playing with cultural themes is highly controversial. Many people, including many S/M players, are of the opinion that no one should play with these ugly realities. Some see such play as insulting, or belittling to their serious struggle to heal from historical oppression and to refuse to be victimized in the present. History offers us many emotional minefields, and a lot of us don't want to have our buttons pushed, because we don't want that particular kind of overwhelming emotional pain happening in our sexual sanctuary.

Playing with the horrors of history brings up all our current struggles with racism, sexism, classism and so on. Bringing historical play into the S/M arena also challenges the secrecy and mistrust that oppressed people use, for good reasons, to protect

themselves in potentially hostile social environments – which means letting go, for the sake of the scene, of some very crucial defenses. For those of us dealing with racism and the history of slavery in the United States, the issues of submission and dominance are especially loaded.

Everybody has a right to protect their feelings. If you don't want to enter into playing with cultural trauma, we support you in that choice. And if you do want to travel in that difficult territory, we support you too.

WHAT IS THE ATTRACTION? The horrors of history comprise our cultural Shadow, and many of us are drawn to it just as we're drawn to our individual and family Shadows – like finding yourself sucking on an aching tooth. The motivations might be something we discover in our fantasies, or out of curiosity – what might it be like to go there on purpose, how would it come out? Or the sense that there's something in that Shadow that we need to know, and a willingness to deal with the consequences. Maybe we want to face our fears, get pushed into seeing, find our power, transform pain into wisdom. Maybe that sexual draw represents the need to bring that terrible history into consciousness, in clear focus, to end repression and start healing.

FROM THE BOTTOM. If you choose to bottom to a script based on cultural trauma, you may be aiming at becoming a warrior by surviving an ordeal, conquering from the bottom by having the emotional strength to deal with oppression, finding out how your ancestors survived. Conquering might mean feeling free to cry for a long time, or beg for mercy, or it might mean stoicism, surviving. It most certainly could involve coming face to face with your own internalized oppression, your own racism. We all have racism, even those of us who are oppressed by it. Playing with it could bring about dissociation, flashbacks, open up wellsprings of rage, and it's possible to fall into really believing

in the moment that the top is angry, despising, sees you as less than human.

Remember, you get to write the script, you get to choose the outcome. You get to conquer, and you get to be received, in the full emotional complexity of all this, as beloved and desirable.

FROM THE TOP. Very scary. As a general rule, in any kink grouping there are a lot more eager victims than there are Simon Legrees. So how would you feel if your friend asked you to call her a nigger? A filthy Jew? A faggot? Tops worry about hurting their bottom's feelings, being seen as racist or sexist, bearing the guilt of our ancestors or shame for our privilege. And what if we like it? What if we get turned on by playing this horrible person?

For the top, playing with cultural trauma offers the opportunity to meet our internalized abuser. We all have one: it's not *if* you discover your precious inner bully, it's *when*. When you play the oppressor as a gift to your bottom, you will find out what your own hooks are to that role. When tops invoke the spirit of bigotry or brutality, what shocks us is how real it can get, how strongly we can feel it. Are we willing to be conscious of that?

Janet recalls what it felt like to play a sexist brute:

**I felt myself in the teeth of the fantasy, hurtling as if
I were on a steep ski slope, unintentional space
opening up before me. The momentum of the scene
took me skidding into dark, unexplored, frightening
territory.**

And let's not assume, as we talk about this, that all the bottoms are members of an oppressed minority, or that all the tops are white and middle-class. What would it be like to be an African-American topping a slavery scene? Or a revenge fantasy? Or a German pretending to be a victim of the Holocaust?

HOW DO YOU DO IT? Negotiate with extreme care, following the suggestions in the next section on emotional safety for deep scenes. Expect a deep emotional charge for both bottom and top. Show a lot of respect for safewords – you may need them. Tops should check in more often than usual, because if the scene really begins to roll, the bottom may forget that there is a safeword, or that there is any consensuality at all. And remember, both top and bottom are playing into shame – so before and after, outside the scene, you want to be very sure to establish mutual respect, regard and affection.

When you are choosing your script, think about the distance or closeness your scenario holds to your actual experience. For most people, further away in history feels safer – so a scene from the Spanish Inquisition may feel less terrifying than one from the Holocaust. Some people choose to play with someone else's cultural trauma rather than their own.

Do remember, when choosing your historical horrors, that you get to do this more than once. So select something relatively easy for the present, and if all goes well, you can take on something more challenging next time. Leaping off cliffs is optional.

The characters we play in these scenes are usually stereotypes. While stereotyping is an active form of societal oppression, stereotypes in scenes are more like archetypes, the icon of the oppressed or oppressing person. The roles act as containers, boundaries that say very clearly, "This is not who I am all the time."

Stereotypes, especially as you are starting up the scene, can easily look more like caricatures, and you may have a hard time keeping a straight face. Just ride it, continue, and let the turn-on gradually draw you into the drama.

An important point of negotiation: white people can't really initiate racial scenes, at least not with anybody they don't know really really well. A question arises for the bottom: would I want

to bottom to someone I suspect is genuinely racist, sexist, a conscious oppressor? Or for the top: If I truly believe in some other people's inferiority, is it okay for me to play this out in scene? We hope not. Ideally, the top is pretending to be an oppressor that she *doesn't* identify with.

AFTERCARE. Plan on aftercare for both or all parties. Everyone in this kind of scene is playing into their own shame and their own Shadow, everyone is terribly vulnerable. Plan for time after the scene, and to talk the next day, and to talk again two or three days later, to see how things are shaking out. If you are partners who live together, it is particularly important to set aside time for these discussions. Making assumptions that everybody is fine is dangerous. It can also be helpful to have some neutral friends that you didn't play with who you can talk to.

PUBLIC PLAY. Cultural trauma scenes are not always appropriate for public play parties. We need to respect the limits of those who haven't consented to play with us, and who have no way to close their ears to shouted slurs. It can be hard to predict what is and is not okay with others around you. And sometimes this can feel like another kind of oppression, when your fellow perverts think your particular scene is disgusting. There is, in our opinion, no one right way to deal with public reaction to highly charged scenes. The problem is not simple, and all we can really do is negotiate as best we can to make room for everybody's needs, and respect everybody's vulnerabilities.

HEALING. Many years ago, we knew a black woman and a white woman who lived together in a full-time owner-slave relationship in which the white woman was the master. They were healthy, happy people, proud of their partnership; eventually they moved to the country to bear and raise their child. Some years later, we had the opportunity to talk with the top in

this relationship, and, knowing they were still together, ask how the slavery question had worked out. She told us that her lover had, after some years, learned what she needed to know from playing into the history of slavery and gotten the healing she was seeking, so they stopped playing such scenes. Now, still together and raising their child, they play other games.

When we painfully seek a deep emotional experience of enslavement, oppression, terror and helplessness, when we bring the horrors of history out of the Shadow and into clear consciousness, when we light up those terrible shadows with love, determination and the sweet fire of erotic energy, we can begin to heal our histories and ourselves.

DEEP EMOTIONAL SAFETY

In a previous chapter we told you how to handle psychological emergencies that might come up when your play accidentally sets off somebody's emotional land mines. In shadow play, you go into that same territory on purpose, and these skills will be your safety net, enabling you to get back out whenever you want to, no matter how deeply you have gone in.

This is advanced play, and we do not advocate shadow play with new partners or with unfamiliar physical techniques – this is no time to fumble. And let us remind you that just as we deplore values that add up to a hierarchy of hip about heaviness in stimulus play, there is no status value in playing deeper than the next guy – play at the depth that feels right to you.

There are still limits, there are always limits – but it may be trickier figuring out what they are. Both of us, for example, have limits about face-slapping because our parents used to do that, so we only allow face-slapping in scenes that are planned to be deep. Janet tells potential tops, “If you slap my face I may come unglued; don't do it unless you're willing to help put me back

together again.” Punishment for real or imagined naughtiness may be hot for one player, too sensitive for another.

You may discover a limit you didn’t know you had. Dossie remembers:

My partner had been playing Mommy to my very young baby, personae that we had fooled around with while snuggling, but never in an actual S/M scene. When we discussed playing a scene with the baby, we decided that it was too scary to hurt her, but that sex might be okay. In scene, I got deeply into my baby role, being fed ice cream, playing with toys, sucking on everything. When we progressed to the sexual part, though, I got confused, overwhelmed and profoundly disturbed. I began to cry in a strange and mournful way, and my partner responded by stopping the sex and comforting me. What I got from the scene was that the baby was not big enough to have sex, and that, since my family was very stern and intolerant of crying children, it was incredibly healing to be comforted when I was upset, with no justifications needed. So in one way this scene was a disaster, and in another way it was a healing experience. A new outcome, and a chance to reclaim a part of myself: the baby who wasn’t allowed to cry. In case you were worried, the baby is fine and just learned to say “doggie.”

When you play with emotional risk, plan to spend some time talking about feelings. Honor your feelings, whatever they may be, as the scene reveals them to you – there is no way that you are “supposed” to feel.

Also remember that you already have psychological defenses that have been protecting you from your own painful stuff. S/M

technique may bypass these defenses for a while, but will not disable them. Your normal defenses will return in due time and continue to protect you as well as they always have. Above all, stay conscious and respect the fragility with which you are playing. Deep scenes connect to unmet wants we had long since given up hope of ever fulfilling; take care to honor the terrible vulnerability of yearning. Shadow play requires a commitment from all players to serious exploration, and a willingness to give that exploration the time, energy and respect it deserves.

How Do You Do It?

So you have inklings of some part of yourself that you or your partner wants to explore. The next question becomes: how do you get there?

If you discovered this space in play by accident, you can return by the same route that got you there in the first place: a role, a script, a costume, a phrase, a whipping or whatever. You might be surprised to find it less scary this time – when you make the choice to walk a risky path, you are much more in control, and it's amazing what the light of consciousness can do to defuse old fears.

You may already have a script in mind, an old fantasy, something you read that turns you on. A lot of S/M erotica has the primal intensity of myth, because fantasies often express the dynamics that run our unconscious minds.

If you want to build a fire, first you should build a fireplace. Negotiate. Talk a lot. Obsess a little. Put out your limits, make a place for your bottom's limits. This could be your story, or your bottom's, but you both need to be safe. Talk about fears, fantasies of what might go wrong. Talk about safewords, and what you will do if something in the scene doesn't work out, a fallback position. Remember that practice makes perfect, and if you try something that doesn't work, you will both be more experienced

the next time. Don't forget to negotiate time for closure, connection, the gradual return to everyday reality. Negotiate how you will deal with any aftershocks: a phone call? A dinner later in the week?

BEGINNING. Negotiate how you are going to start. You can approach psychological depths by going through old wounds, reenacting abuse, becoming parent, child, perpetrator, bully, brat, crybaby and vicious schoolmarm. You can act out forbidden feelings – angry, amoral, cruel – and their equally forbidden opposites, pathetic, needy, frightened, ashamed. Physically, you might gather up the power with bondage, a collar, a blindfold, the order to kneel. Find the feelings that are most powerful for you by going for the juice, the charge, the place where your emotions are strong and scary: this is your fire. You built your fireplace when you negotiated your scene, so you are safe, and you can explore one step at a time. To increase the intensity, you can make heat with friction, tension, resistance – pushing against each other to amplify, blow up flames from coals.

MIDDLE. What do you do when you get into those intense roles and feelings? Let your physical script support you. For instance, if you and your bottom have agreed on a flogging, as the heat rises you can imagine running your intense feelings down your arm and out the end of the whip into your bottom – believe us, she will feel it, and you will too.

You can use any activity as a focus for your energy, and to get more fully into your role. You know your bottom: limits, preferences, what gets the endorphins running, what arouses, what triggers an orgasm.

Who says you have to be consistent? Tops can play from multiple positions in the same scene, from torture, wickedness and betrayal to support, love and nurturance. We see no contradiction in a big bad mean top who has just tortured some

poor bottom, now patting that bottom on the back while murmuring “there, there, poor baby, you’re all right now.” The inquisitor who tortures the sinner must have great love to go to such lengths to save that immortal soul, right?

Techniques of interrogation can be used to confuse and liberate the bottom by generating a double-bind, like ordering someone to tell the truth as you insist that he lie, just like real brainwashing. For betrayal, you can make your bottom struggle to meet your demands and then punish him for succeeding. The ways to create no-win situations for mindfuck are endless, and most of them are based on intensely polarized contrast between hurting and caressing.

ENDING. We empower ourselves when we replay old scripts and arrange for them to come out differently. Ideally, all scenes end in a win for both players. The successful completion of a scene gives feelings of competence, mastery, control and empowerment, and as the top you can reinforce those feelings in your bottom by offering praise for how well she took the sensations, or followed your orders, or by letting your bottom know how good you feel, how turned on you are. He can tell you how wonderful you are too.

Most of what we dig up from our shadows consists of feelings or roles that we have some shame about, so sharing that piece of ourselves is powerfully intimate. We are letting another person into a part of ourselves that we ourselves may have rejected. And when that person accepts us, complete with our old tapes, and responds with erotic enthusiasm, then we get the ultimate validation: love given to the part of ourselves that we may fear the most.

You close a deep scene just as you close any other scene, only make sure you do it. Don’t skip on time and energy for the return trip to the so-called real world. When you prepare for

voyaging in the shadows, discuss how much time you will have afterwards, if anyone thinks he may want time alone, if you will sleep together, whatever feels most comfortable. Do allow lots of time for snuggling and good feelings, and do check back in over the next several days so you both can talk about any aftershocks you may experience.

WHAT ABOUT THERAPY? Does deep psychological play make the top into a therapist? Emphatically not. Shadow play can be therapeutic, and indeed healing, but is very different from a therapeutic relationship. Ideally, your relationship with a professional therapist is an island where you can explore your inner truth with no consequences in the rest of your life. A BDSM scene is also an island, but with very different rules and boundaries.

If you find yourself digging up a profound conflict, maybe in the form of intense emotions, panicky feelings or flashbacks to old trauma, you might well want to seek therapy, whether or not you plan to play with this dynamic in S/M. When an old conflict opens up, there is opportunity for healing, and therapy will not only protect your partner from having to be your therapist, but will allow you to work on your issues at a time that is very likely to be profitable for you. In the Resource Guide, you will find a website that lists BDSM-friendly therapists and a couple of books that can help you find and talk to one.

SHADOWS AND REBIRTH

There is a Native American medicine story about Crow who dances between the worlds. At one time Crow became fascinated with her shadow. She could not leave it alone. She kept looking at it, scratching it, poking at it, pecking it, until her shadow woke up and came to life. Then Crow's shadow ate her.

In this story, Crow gets chewed up to emerge transformed, with the ability to travel between the everyday world and the spirit world. Many myths feature heroes and heroines who travel into the shadows, get destroyed and then reborn, transformed and enlightened by the experience. These stories warn that travel in the shadow is both dangerous and rewarding. We have written here what we know about how to travel as safely as possible in your precious darkness. If your intuition tells you that this kind of play does not feel safe or growthful to you, we suggest that you trust your inner wisdom and refrain. Perhaps later you may feel differently, and perhaps you will not. Perhaps another path will work better for your journey to self-knowledge.

Once again, all BDSM play is shadow play – when we play together, we find acceptance for emotions and behaviors that would be unacceptable outside scene space. And we believe that all play is potentially, and potently, healing and growthful. When we venture purposefully into our darkest shadows, we get to write our own script, determine the outcome, validate forbidden and rejected parts of ourselves, reclaim parts of ourselves that we had lost or buried, and find ways to grasp all the parts of ourselves, every single one, in a profound act of self-acceptance through which we may become whole.

S/M SPIRITUALITY: FROM THE TOP

Sex is spiritual. We live in a culture that has historically insisted that sex and spirituality are mutually exclusive, in a country founded by puritans who were convinced that God hated sex. But as radical perverts, our experience and our belief is that sex is spiritual, and that a simple honest orgasm is a spiritual experience.

Sexuality has been a path for both of us – the road we originally took to question our individual and social programming. Discovering the ways in which we as women could grasp our sexuality was a powerful way to heal from our childhoods and from our sex-negative culture. We have proceeded from that healing to further self-exploration, and to celebrating our spirituality in the practice of S/M.

Michel Foucault, a 20th-century philosopher whose insights into the relationship between power and sex have informed a great deal of current thinking about BDSM, tells us that attempts to distinguish and set apart specific "sexualities" are an artifact of a culture that fears and fences off sex, especially unusual sex. Your authors believe that if our culture truly accepted its sexuality, we would all instinctively understand that sexual energy flows through everything all the time, like spiritual energy, like

the life force, like the 'Tao, like a river. The cosmic river flows through each of us, bearing nourishment, washing away what we no longer need, making us wet. With S/M as our boat, we can travel on that river to and beyond our wildest dreams.

SHADOW AND SPIRIT

Remember the diagram in the previous chapter of Carl Jung's map of the human mind? Jung understood spirituality as both a personal and a universal awareness that he called the Collective Unconscious. We told you before about the Shadow, that dark and scary reservoir of everything we have decided to banish from our awareness. And in this murky realm we find the archetypes we play with, the pantheons of villains and rescuers, that offer us scripts for exploring our Unconscious minds, and ultimately that Collective Unconscious. We explained how we use S/M to explore our darkness, illuminate it with our clear awareness, and reclaim forbidden territory as psychological healing, a way of becoming whole. And all of this is spiritual.

When we add ritual to our S/M, performing it with spiritual intention, we can travel deeper yet... beyond the personal unconscious mind and into universal consciousness, or spiritual awareness. So the shadow, our personal garbage pit, becomes the gateway through which we pass to travel in realms beyond ordinary consciousness, like Crow who dances between the worlds.

S/M RITUAL AS SPIRITUAL PATH

Ritual S/M is edge play directed to the purpose of attaining altered states of consciousness, of traveling beyond our habitual perceptual screens to another way of being in which everything becomes special, extraordinary, brilliant. Goals for such a scene might be a quest for guidance or a vision, the pursuit of personal

truth and understanding, or the experience of spiritual communion for its own sake.

S/M players have devised rituals for these purposes by mixing our sexual exploration and our own personal mythologies (our S/M roles and stories, like *The Kidnapping of the Pleasure Slave*) with spiritual practices we learn from other traditions: kundalini yoga, the rites of Kali, vision quest, wherever we find the images that help us manifest what is beyond our ability to imagine. Take, for example, a scene based on the simple act of chanting. Dossie recalls:

My bottom and I were in deep grief over a mutual friend and mentor we had lost to AIDS, and we had decided to seek release in ritual S/M. I tied her to a padded table and flogged her to the point of weeping, all the while chanting “Om Krim Kalyae Namaha,” an invocation to Kali, the terrifying Hindu goddess of death and birth. As I struck with the whip in rhythm with the chant, I felt myself go into trance, the words of the chant serving to occupy my conscious mind, leaving me free to feel the energy flowing through the whip, my bottom’s grief surging beneath me, until I felt in myself Kali the inexorable, the implacable force of nature which dictates that everything we love must die. My partner struggled with her grief, writhing and thrashing, held safe by the bondage, and wept copiously, chanting “Jaia Ma,” an invocation to the Mother goddess, over and over, until both of our grief and despair had been fully poured out, and we had reached a sense of exhausted peace with the universe. The Hindus say of Kali that there is no way to understand her, no logic to explain her, no justification – she is like a

storm, we have no choice but to love her, and in that love, come to acceptance of our human condition.

EDGE PLAY. The edge in edge play is found wherever your edge is, wherever things start to feel risky, where you start to feel vulnerable, the edge of the cliff that looks over your personal abyss. Playing on the edge challenges the top into heightened awareness. A bondage top of our acquaintance specializes in rope suspension, the art of hanging a bottom in mid air supported by nothing but rope. The challenge of playing on the edge of her skill and knowledge brings her into her top space, and awakens her psychic and spiritual power. Sometimes she has visions and sees animal spirits. She sees her task as to open and balance the body so the spirit – kundalini energy – can flow through freely. When the bondage sends the bottom flying, sex may have a place as a grounding sensation, bringing the person back into his or her body in a state of bliss. In the balance of bondage, we play with suspension, with suspense, with gravity, with the energy of the entire planet.

People experience spirituality in many different ways, and all of them are valid. It has been said that any path, walked with mindfulness and honesty, can lead to enlightenment. What different descriptions of spiritual awakening often have in common is the feeling of casting off everyday consciousness and opening to beautiful, potent energy from inside or outside yourself. BDSM has the power to open up perceptions so that you can see more than you usually do, become hyperconscious. Imagine the slave who is completely attuned to his master's needs, wants, and whims, reading signals with extraordinary accuracy, predicting a desire before it even becomes conscious. Now imagine that hyperawareness extended into the outer and inner universe...

Let's not forget that ordinary consciousness is really extraordinary too, a miracle whose workings we have not even begun to fathom. Even our defenses, that we complain about when we have difficulty opening up, should be honored, because they form the skin that protects and contains us. Our ego is both our mask and our means of communication, how we define the boundaries between ourselves and the person beside us, how we hide and how we show ourselves. So honor your defenses, your shell, your mask, even when you are in the process of putting them aside. Thank them for protecting you.

ROLES IN RITUAL. To top in ritual S/M, you need to be a responsible guide. You need to train yourself, develop your own spiritual practice, and educate yourself far beyond what you can learn from reading this one chapter in this one small book. You must be ready to care for your bottom, to operate from your own most serious wisdom, to trust and honor your bottom's wisdom, and always to empower your bottom. To use ritual to aggrandize yourself or to bolster your flagging ego by belittling your bottom is unethical, and a violation of sacred space. The priest's role is often to serve the communicant.

When both people in a ritual let their masks down they recognize one another in a way that permits that validation of all the parts of themselves. They may express those parts as personae they have discovered through the archetypes, the images of the divine manifest in human form that we call gods and goddesses – or they may simply feel what is absolutely real, needing no further definition.

Start by knowing yourself, and knowing your intention. Be clean in your intentions, and keep the boundaries clear. Respect that the bottom is allowing you to come into his or her most precious places, opening up to allow you deeper contact, contributing spirit and courage to this journey.

S/M ritual requires mutual openness, which means that you, the top, must also be willing to expose yourself, to get vulnerable, to make connection. It is possible to open a bottom's psyche up with good ritual technique, but to pour yourself into him when he is open, and to allow him to pour into you, requires that you be open too. When you open the energy in yourself it becomes a light by which you can find that energy in another. You put yourself in a position that requires empathy and psychic connection, and so you are more likely to find it.

The top starts out as a caretaker, and that task and the empathy it requires can open up the dance for you. When we set out to teach a spiritual truth to another, we must consciously grasp our own wisdom: the final stage of learning is to teach what we know to another. The skilled top becomes the shaman, the dramaturge, the spirit guide, the magician who pulls down energy from the cosmos. The bottom contributes to and shares in that energy as you send him or her out spinning into personal visions, while you, as top, get to ride your bottom's energy and discover yet more of your own potential, your potency, your power. When we see our spirit reflected in the magic mirror of our bottom's glowing eyes, we become free to realize the god/dess within.

RITUAL PRACTICE

So how do you make an S/M scene into a ritual? A ritual is the performance of a series of symbolic acts that work like keys to change our state of awareness. To do ritual successfully, we begin by creating a sacred space, a place free of interruptions or everyday constraints, a safe space of mutual trust and respect, an optimum space to focus on the journeying. We clear the everyday stuff out of the way so we can feel the subtler energy of spiritual consciousness.

Start with cleansing both of you, individually or together. A bath scented with fresh lemons or a bubble bath will do fine – it's the attention you focus on the cleansing that achieves it. Imagine washing all the tension off and letting it gurgle down the drain. Let your attention travel over your entire body, feeling how the warm water relaxes each part, allowing vibrant energy to fill you up. Visualize each little source of tension, each little worry, each little attachment dissolving and flowing into the sea.

Pack up all your cares and woes... try writing them on a piece of paper and putting the paper in your freezer for a time. Respect your cares by promising them that you will return to pick them up again when your ritual is over. They may be different by then.

Cleanse the space, the room in which you will play out your ritual. Sweep, dust, remove dissonant objects, bring in fresh sheets and towels, sweeten the air with herbs or incense. Perform these humble acts with all the consciousness you can bring to them.

Create a focus in the space, a setting for your journey, with candles, music, pillows to nestle in, perhaps an altar of objects that carry special significance. In time you may develop your own symbol system – images and stories, deities, crystals, bones, whatever resonates for you – your personal symbol structure is your web of connection with the flow of nature and the divine, keys that open the doors to heightened states of consciousness.

In ritual space, choose carefully who and what you allow close to you – when your mask is off, you are both more open and more vulnerable. As we cleanse and protect our sacred space, we build a safe hearth to contain some very wild fires.

PLANNING AND NEGOTIATING. Rituals get negotiated just like any other scene, by talking about what is important to each of you, preparing to validate and respect everyone's needs

and limits. An S/M ritual may or may not incorporate genital sex. It may or may not incorporate pain. It may or may not include opening the skin. And then again it may. You can ritualize anything by doing it with intention, and you give a special significance to instruments that you employ in ritual. So clean all your toys too.

The physical focus of a ritual might be a flogging, or other intense stimulus to raise endorphins. Bondage can be ritual in and of itself, a meditation on rope and constraint, muscles and limbs, balance. You can open the skin with piercings or cutting, for the sensation of it, to imprint a mark of symbolic meaning, or to connect through that opening.

Good ritual has a beginning, a middle and an end. It starts by defining where you are, by cleaning and by forming a circle or enclosed psychic space, and by defining your intention – perhaps with a statement to your partner, perhaps with an invocation to whatever deity has relevance to your purpose. In the middle you perform the acts you have agreed upon, and see where they take you. The end is closure, in which you return to normal consciousness, often by going back over the symbolic path that you walked in the beginning, thanking the powers and deities on the way, and returning any energy you may have raised that you can no longer use. Some players offer that energy to the greater good, like world peace or healing the environment: the Buddhists call this a dedication of merit.

Ritual works. Symbolic acts have real consequences in our lives, the power of pulling down energy to manifest in the real world, of bringing spirit into our bodies and onto the planet, of realizing. It is dangerous to treat ritual frivolously, as if symbolic acts won't change anything. Magic works. Take care, be mindful. Have respect.

POWER AND MANIFESTATION

We are using the metaphors of power and cosmic energy interchangeably, because our understanding is that personal power is the universal life force, power that we can access whether we envision it as coming from within or from outside us. Janet, when a scene is working well, feels energy from some external source pour into her like white light – others report seeing that light in her too. When this is happening, she feels as if she can do no wrong, that she is totally connected to what she is doing with her bottom. Dossie feels the energy welling up from within herself, or perhaps from underneath her, power from the earth's hot molten interior, and when that power is with her she also feels totally empowered and in total communication with her bottom.

With that power – personal, planetary, cosmic – comes the understanding that we are all manifestations of the same energy, and that we have the power to change how we manifest ourselves. This is the power of transformation, and of transcendence. To manifest is to realize, to make real and thereby understand. In *S/M* we take a fantasy, a myth, a vision or a dream and manifest it, live it out in our bodies, sculpt it with the forces of endorphins, eroticism and consciousness, and bring it into the material world.

17

THE LIGHT THAT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS

Who tells me Thou art dark
Oh my Mother divine?
Thousands of suns and moons
From Thy body do shine!

— *translation of a Hindu chant to Kali*

We sadomasochists are always playing out heroic myths, and exploring altered awareness. What lies beyond the edge, over the cliff? The journey leads into darkness, into the unknown, where we must walk with care because we cannot see our footing, like exploring in caves deep under the earth. Thus, all BDSM is to some degree ritual – a voyage of self-discovery, a journey through the darkness and toward the light of transcendence.

The darkness may be of our own creating, but we still cannot see what is in there until we are courageous enough to enter it. Then it is our own consciousness that becomes the light that

shines in the darkness, that illuminates our inner landscape as if we carried spotlights in our metaphysical (or metaphorical) eyes.

The archangel of the territory of the Earth is Lucifer, often pictured as a frightening goatish demon of evil and darkness. But the name Lucifer actually means light-bearer; he is the fallen angel who goes into unfathomable darkness with an unquenchable light inside him, and who carries the power of the villain and of the emancipator.

It is within the darkness of the earth, in the cool depths where seeds germinate, that the material of waste and decay is transformed into fertilizer for new life. When we evoke our personal demons in an S/M scene, we dig up the darkest and most difficult aspects of life's journey, and with the magic of erotic energy transform that shit into our rose garden.

S/M is sex magic, and you are the magician. The bottom is the cauldron in which you perform your miracles. Wave your wand, and make magic happen... as you mix your bottom's power and your own, heat them up with the fire of passion, and with that potent precious power turn lead into gold, misery into exaltation, bondage into liberation and sex into revelation.

So have a great journey, with our blessings – and more power to you.

Catherine A. Liszt

Dossie Easton

January, 2003

RESOURCE GUIDE

We can't possibly include all the excellent resources – print, online and groups – that can help you in your journey as a bottom. Please consider this section as a jumping-off point so you can go on making discoveries on your own.

BOOKS

Note: Some of the best books on BDSM are currently out of print. We encourage you to seek out used copies if possible.

Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M, by Samois. Alyson Publications, Boston.

The Complete Guide to Safer Sex, Ted McIlvenna et al. Barricade Books, Fort Lee, NJ.

Consensual Sadoomasochism: How to Talk About It and How to Do It Safely, by William A. Henkin, Ph.D. and Sybil Holiday. Daedalus Publishing, Los Angeles.

Different Loving: The World of Sexual Dominance and Submission, by Gloria G. Brame, William D. Brame, and Jon Jacobs. Random House, NY.

Exhibitionism for the Shy, by Carol Queen. Down There Press, San Francisco.

Jay Wiseman's Erotic Bondage Handbook, by Jay Wiseman. Greenery Press, Emeryville, CA.

Learning the Ropes: A Basic Guide to Safe and Fun S-M Lovemaking by Race Bannon. Daedalus Publishing, Los Angeles.

Leatherfolk, edited by Mark Thompson. Alyson Publications, Los Angeles.

Leathersex: A Guide for the Curious Outsider and the Serious Player, by Joseph Bean. Daedalus Publishing, Los Angeles.

The Lesbian S/M Safety Manual, edited by Pat Califia. Alyson Publications, Boston.

The Loving Dominant, John Warren. Greenery Press, Emeryville, CA.

The Master's Manual, Jack Rinella. Daedalus Publishing, Los Angeles.

Partners In Power: Living In Kinky Relationships, Jack Rinella. Greenery Press, Emeryville, CA.

Screw the Roses, Send Me the Thorns, by Philip Miller & Molly Devon. Mystic Rose Books, Fairfield, CT.

Sensuous Magic: A Guide for Adventurous Lovers, by Pat Califia. Cleis Press, San Francisco.

SM 101: A Realistic Introduction, by Jay Wiseman. Greenery Press, Emeryville, CA.

The New Bottoming Book, by Dossie Easton and Janet W. Hardy. Greenery Press, Emeryville, CA.

Ties That Bind: The SM/Leather/Fetish Erotic Style – Issues, Commentaries and Advice, by Guy Baldwin. Daedalus Publishing, Los Angeles.

PERIODICALS

Prometheus. Published by The Eulenspiegel Society.
www.tes.org, or TES, PO Box 2783, Grand Central Station,
New York, NY 10163-2783.

ORGANIZATIONS

Black Rose, Washington, DC. www.br.org.

The Eulenspiegel Society, New York. www.tes.org, or
PO Box 2783, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163-
2783.

Gay Men's SM Activists, www.gmsma.org.

Lesbian Sex Mafia, New York. www.lesbiansexmafia.org.

National Leather Association International. www.nla-i.org,
or 4038 Cedar Springs Road, #961, Dallas, Texas 75219.

The Society of Janus, San Francisco. www.soj.org, or P.O.
Box 411523, San Francisco, CA 94141-1523, 415-292-3222

WEBSITES & ON-LINE RESOURCES

www.domsufriends.com offers links to hundreds of
BDSM clubs, organizations, munches and other resources
worldwide.

The Usenet newsgroup *soc.subculture.bondage-bdsm* is
a freewheeling open discussion of all topics related to BDSM
(and quite a few that aren't).

SCREAM

BY JANET W. HARDY

from lungs that fill your whole body

Scream

because you can't keep it in and you won't let it out

Scream

the storm that blows ocean through you, wind, smoke

Scream

so huge I have to suck in air to help

I love your scream

because you scream tears into my eyes

I love your scream

because it howls through all your beautiful holes

I love your scream

because of everybody who has ever screamed

Scream into my mouth

Scream into my cunt

Scream into my clever hands

Scream into this poem

Lover, when you suffer for me

Scream for me

The classic text on how to be the bottom of your dreams... completely revised and updated for the new millennium!

"The only way I can think of to learn more about bottoming than Dossie Easton and Janet Hardy tell you in this book is to go out and bottom for yourself." – William A. Henkin, Ph.D., co-author, "Consensual Sadomasochism"

"An excellent guidebook packed with realistic, useful information!" – Jay Wiseman, author, "SM 101"

"A clever, humorous introduction to the wonderful world of bottoming. Overtly sensitive and inclusive, with added material that really shines, it's as relevant – if not more so – to tops as well as bottoms, no matter what your other orientations are." – Laura Antoniou, author, the Marketplace series

"The gap between fantasy and real-time play can be so vast that many kinky dreamers lose heart. Dossie Easton and Janet Hardy are here to help us make our dreams come true." – Dr. Carol Queen, author, "Real Live Nude Girl" and "The Leather Daddy and the Femme"

"An eye-opening exploration of what it means to experience the joy of surrender and the bliss of kink-induced endorphin rushes. The New Bottoming Book's depth, wisdom, and pragmatism can only come from authors who have 'been there and done that' thoroughly, zealously, and tirelessly." – Jack Rinella, columnist and author of "The Master's Manual" and "The Compleat Slave"

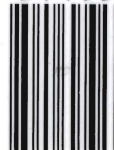


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